FAMOUS WESTERN

FALL ISSUE

10¢

THE KID GOES GUN-WOLF

2 NEW NOVELS

A Complete SILVER KID NOVEL by J. W. FORD

$5000

DEAD

SATAN'S GUN-SON by ED EARL REPP

Missing page

Inside Front Cover

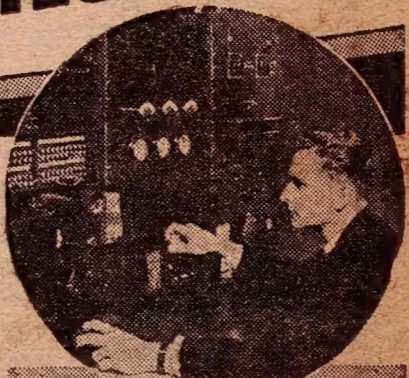
FALL 1942

J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio Institute
Established 27 Years

I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE

to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to

BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (bottom illustration), a booming field today pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time.

I Trained These Men

$200 a Month in Own Business

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field."—ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

$5 to $10 Week in Spare Time

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from $5 to $10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy."—THEODORE K. DuBREE, Horsham, Penn.

Sergeant in Signal Corps

"I am now a Sergeant in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps. My duties cover Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers, handling duties of the Chief Operator in his absence."—SERGEANT RICHARD W. ANDERSON, U. S. Army. (Address omitted for military reasons.)

HERE is a quick way to better pay. Radio offers you the opportunity to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full time Radio jobs paying up to $50 a week. MAIL COUPON. Get my Sample Lesson FREE. Examine it, read it—see how easy it is to understand. See how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Operator or Radio Technician.

Real Opportunities for Beginners to Learn Then Earn Up to $50 a Week

Broadcasting stations (882 in the U.S.) employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. The Radio repair business is booming due to shortage of new home and auto Radio sets, (there are 57,400,000 in use) giving good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of these opportunities to have their own Radio Service businesses. The Government needs many Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Think of the many good-pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Mail the COUPON, NOW!

I'll Show You How to Make $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

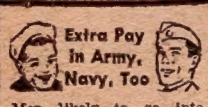
Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable, practical experience. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Find Out How I Train You at Home For Good Pay in Radio

MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send you a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book FREE. Learn about my Course; the types of jobs in different branches of Radio. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President,
Dept. 2JA2, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS



Extra Pay in Army, Navy, Too

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, much higher pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. It's Smart to Train for Radio NOW!

Mail Coupon Now!

This FREE BOOK has Helped Hundreds of Men to Make More Money

Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 2JA2
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

City ..... State 2FR

FAMOUS WESTERN

10¢

Vol. 5, No. 2 Fall, 1942 Issue

TWO GREAT NEW NOVELS

THE KID GOES GUN-WOLF

By T. W. Ford 10

A stolen girl, a terrified father, and and intimidated town were the ingredients in this coyote setup. And the Silver Kid found that he had to take up quarters in jail and tack on the name of a wanted man before he could draw chips in the game!

SATAN'S GUN-SON

By Ed Earl Repp 32

Bronc Howden had his father's past to fight as well as his own sins; and all fingers were pointing at him . . .

FIVE SWIFT-MOVING SHORT STORIES

WITNESS FOR THE DEVIL .....By G. C. Ogle 49

Ames Hostler had a witness in his game that couldn't be bought — but Careful Jones figured it could be turned against him — if a man dared risk Hell to catch the Devil's Witness.

VALLEY OF WHISPERING DEATH .....By Archie Joscelyn 61

There was something in that valley that killed and it wasn't bullets, knives, or ropes!

MEDICO'S BAD MEDICINE .....By Cliff Campbell 74

Duty demanded that Clint Harbison save the life of the wounded owlhoot, but Clint knew that his own position were better if the polecat died! And it was more than just the gun at Clint's back that urged him to make that fatal mistake!

SIX-GUN REVIVAL AT GOSPEL GULCH .....By A. Kenneth Brent 79

C. Lemuel Pernberry was a man of peace, but it wasn't healthy to cross him twice!

GUNSMOKE CURE .....By Lee Floren 84

Only gunsmoke could cure Rusty Midland's fear of guns!

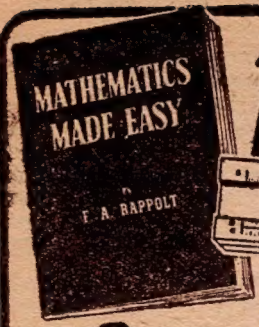
A WESTERN FACT ARTICLE

BOOTHILL BONANZAS .....By Kenneth P. Wood 69

About some of those fabulously rich mines which mostly enriched Hell!

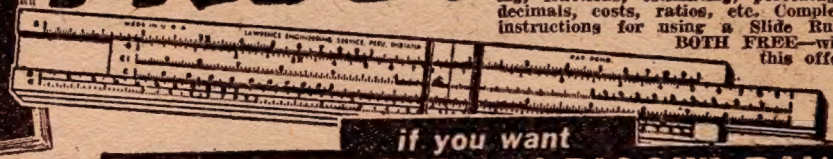
Robert W. Lowndes - Editor

FAMOUS WESTERN, published quarterly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 60 Hudson St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Yearly subscription 40c. Printed in U. S. A.



FREE!

THIS VALUABLE NEW BOOK "Mathematics Made Easy" — gives you simplified instruction in every phase of figuring ALL types of work, PLUS a FREE Deluxe Professional 10 inch SLIDE RULE. Saves time, simplifies all calculating, fractions, estimating, percentage, decimals, costs, ratios, etc. Complete instructions for using a Slide Rule, BOTH FREE—with this offer.



if you want

A BETTER JOB and BIGGER PAY

Learn

Thru New SHADOWGRAPH Method —You Read Blueprints the First Day

BLUEPRINT READING

AMAZING NEW INVENTION

Makes Blueprint Reading Easy as Seeing a Movie
Learn at Home—Easily, Quickly—In Spare Time
THOUSANDS OF MEN WANTED AT ONCE!

MEN of ALL AGES and ALL TRADES
if you are a
Mechanic, Student, Welder, Carpenter, Plumber, Shipbuilder, Machinist, Sheet Metal Worker, Tool Maker, Electrician, Steel Worker, Aviation Mechanic, etc.
you must know
BLUEPRINT READING
to win promotion and bigger pay

Better Jobs — Bigger Pay are waiting for men who can READ BLUEPRINTS. Here, at last, is a new quick and easy shortcut way to learn Blueprint Reading at Home in an amazingly short time — at an unbelievably low cost. This sensational "Shadowgraph" Method of Blueprint Reading was created by Nationally Famous Experts — skilled in teaching technical subjects to men without previous technical education. They have eliminated all complicated details, they explain all technical words in simple language. Contains everything you need to know about Reading Blueprints — no matter what kind of work you do.

NOW ANYONE CAN READ BLUEPRINTS

Everything about Blueprint Reading is put right at your finger-tips! Simple as A, B, C. No need to attend an expensive trade or technical school. No previous technical or special education is needed. Here's a speedy Blueprint Reading Course for all trades that is ABSOLUTELY different. No dry textbooks — you learn by seeing and doing — and you READ BLUEPRINTS from the very FIRST DAY. With this amazing new method—a few minutes a day is all you need to read Blueprints on sight. This simplified, spare-time, Home Study Course meets all Blueprint Requirements for Civil Service and National Defense Jobs.

CREATED BY NOTED EXPERTS
H. V. WALSH, B. A., Professor, Columbia U., 1919-1935; F. A. RAPPOLT, B.S., C.E., Prof., School of Tech., City College, N.Y.; E. E. BURNS, B.S., M.E., Prof., Newark Co. of Engineering.

QUALIFY QUICKLY FOR A BIG PAY JOB

Here is really big news for you — if you have a job, or if you want a job in any branch of aviation, shipbuilding, sheet metal work, welding, electricity, machine tooling, plumbing, carpentry, radio, building, automotive and Diesel Engineering, or any other of the mechanical, construction or DEFENSE INDUSTRIES—the AUSTIN TECH "Shadowgraph" Methor CAN HELP YOU QUALIFY for a BETTER JOB AND BIGGER PAY in an amazingly short time. This marvelous home-study method is so easy—it enables even a school boy to learn Blueprint Reading from the first day!

This 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course is packed in a specially constructed bookcase, which in itself is a unique "Working Model" designed to enable you to read Blueprints from the first day. The Course contains over 600 Actual Blueprints—Charts—Tables—Diagrams—Signs—Symbols and other Instructive Pictures that help you to read Blueprints practically on sight.

EVERYTHING IS SENT TO YOU AT ONCE! FOR 5 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

The complete 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course is sent to you together with the specially constructed "Working Model" Bookcase. You also get FREE—"Mathematics Made Easy" and Professional Slide Rule. Everything is sent in one shipment. ACT TODAY — DUE TO RISING PRICES FREE GIFT OFFER IS LIMITED.

AUSTIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
899 Broad Street, Div. H-10, Newark, N. J.

SEND NO MONEY

FREE EXAMINATION

AUSTIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
899 Broad St., Div. H-10, Newark, N. J.

Send me on FREE APPROVAL your complete 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course with special "Working Model" Bookcase. I am to get FREE "Mathematics Made Easy" and Professional Slide Rule. I will pay postman $1.95, plus postage and C. O. D. charges on arrival. If I return everything within 5 days you are to refund my money in full. Otherwise I will remit $2 monthly for 3 months and a final payment of $1 for the 4th month until the total price of $8.95 is paid. (10% discount if full payment accompanies order—same refund guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

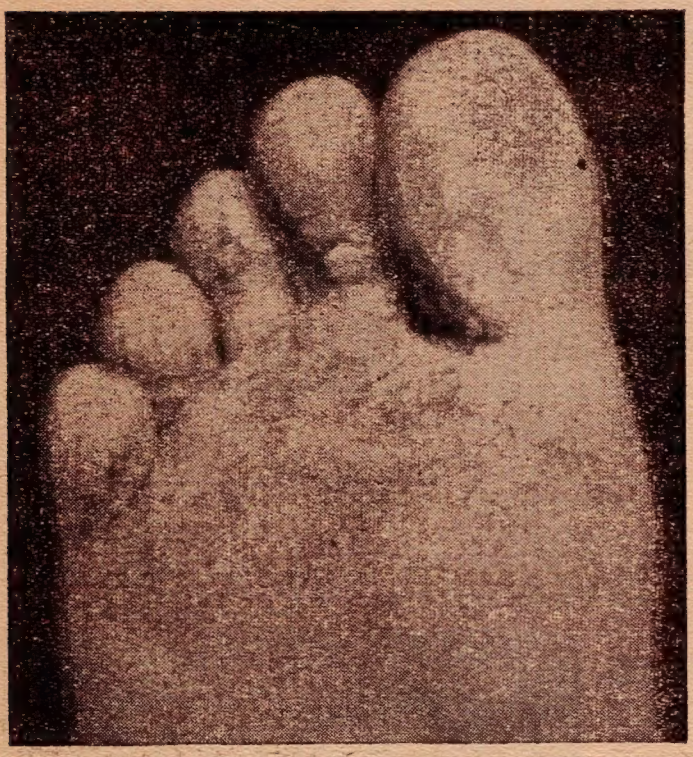
City .....State.....

Reference .....

Address .....

NOTE: If you enclose $1.95 with coupon—we will pay all postage charges. Every cent refunded if not satisfied.

FOOT ITCH
ATHLETE'S FOOT



WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. every night until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

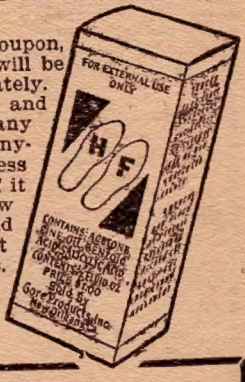
H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

GORE PRODUCTS, Inc. D.A.

881 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

Let me make you a SUPERMAN!

"Give me just 15 minutes a day—and I'll PROVE I can Work Wonders with YOUR BODY" *Charles Atlas*

Holder of Title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"

WHEN you stand before your mirror, stripped to the skin, what do you see? A body you can be really proud of? A build that others admire and talk about? OR—are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are your arms and legs like rails—when they should and CAN be driving pistons of power?

If you're honest enough with yourself to admit that physically you're only **half** a man **now**—then I want to prove I can make you a SUPERMAN in double-quick time!

Friend, I KNOW what it means to be on the "no-muscle" side of the fence. I was there myself at one time! Weighed exactly 97 pounds. A skinny, string-bean body that was so comical others laughed at me. But to me it was no joke. I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim.

My Discovery

Then I discovered **"Dynamic Tension."** In record time it built my body to such ideal proportions that when I faced all comers in open competition the judges awarded me the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

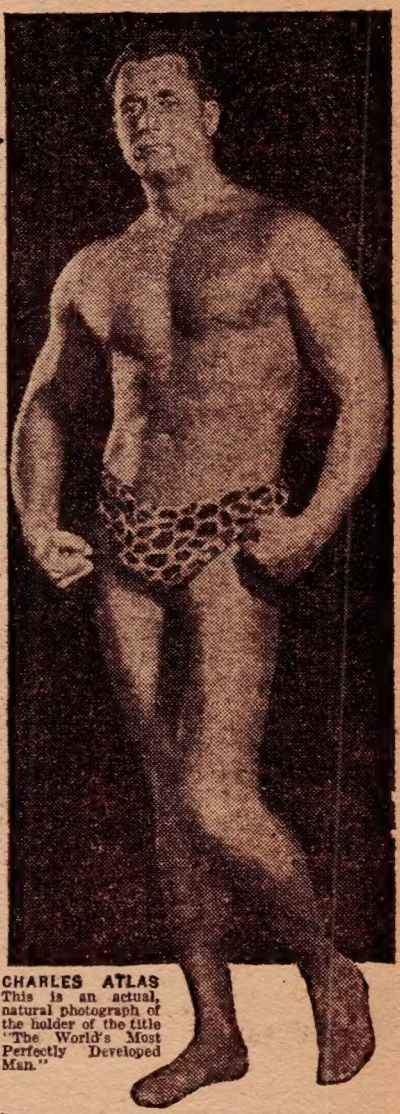
"Dynamic Tension" is the NATURAL method for building your body into the physical perfection every man wants. I've seen it work wonders for other men. I'll show you photographs of them so you can see for yourself!

Only 15 Minutes a Day

Muscles grow fast the **"Dynamic Tension"** way! You don't slave away at monotonous, tiresome, "squirrel-in-a-cage" motions that get nowhere. Instead, this method is actually fun! You **feel** yourself developing!

That's why I say—"Give me the chance to prove it and I'll OPEN YOUR EYES!" No two ways about it. Tell me where you want the muscles and I'll make it my job to put them there.

Right in that body of yours is all the makings of an Atlas Champion. I'll show you exactly how to get a handsome, husky pair of shoulders—a deep, he-man chest—arm and leg muscles hard as rocks yet limber as a whip—rippled guards of solid muscles across your stomach (the surest protection against rupture)—every inch of you all man, he-man, SUPERMAN!



CHARLES ATLAS This is an actual, natural photograph of the holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Here's PROOF Right Here!

"Results come so fast through your method that it seems just as if some magician put on the pounds of solid muscle just where you want them!" —W. L., Missouri

"Feel like a million dollars and have a 4½ in. normal chest—a 2 in. GAIN!" —L. A. S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. Have put two inches on my chest and ½ inch on my neck." —S. L., Oregon

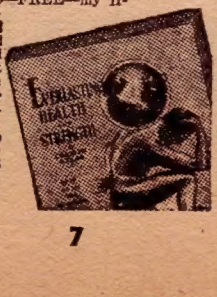
"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in." —G. M., Ohio

"Your book opened my eyes . . . I 1-4 in. gain on my biceps and 1 in. more on my chest!" —J. F., Penna.

Send for FREE BOOK

I don't ask a penny to tell you the story of **"Dynamic Tension"** and show you actual photographs of the amazing results it has given other men, young and old. And I don't know why it shouldn't do just as much for **YOU!**

So mail this coupon right now for full details. I'll send you at once—FREE—my illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Packed with photos, it will tell you how to start putting **"Dynamic Tension"** to work for **YOUR** body. And remember, it's **FREE.** Get it now! Mail the coupon to me personally. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 4-Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 4-Z
115 East 23rd St., New York, N.Y.

I want the proof that your system of **"Dynamic Tension"** will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

AUDELS NEW MACHINISTS HANDYBOOK NOW READY!

1600 PAGES FULLY ILLUSTRATED

A SHOP COMPANION THAT ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

Easy to read and understand—flexible covers—Handy size 5 x 6½ x 2—a ready reference that answers your questions accurately.

TO GET THIS ASSISTANCE FOR YOURSELF SIMPLY FILL IN AND MAIL COUPON TODAY

$4 COMPLETE PAY ONLY $1 A MO.

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York

Prepare!

A KEY TO MODERN SHOP PRACTICE

PRACTICAL INSIDE INFORMATION

For Every Machinist, Toolmaker, Engineer, Machine Operator, Mechanical Draughtsman, Metal Worker, Mechanic or Student. This 1600 Page Handy Book Covers Modern Machine Shop Practice in All Its Branches.

A COMPLETE INSTRUCTOR WITH READY REFERENCE INDEX

New from Cover to Cover. Tells How to Operate and Set Up Lathes, Screw & Milling Machines, Shapers, Drill Presses & All Other Machine Tools.

5 PRACTICAL BOOKS IN ONE!
60 FULLY ILLUSTRATED CHAPTERS

Covering: **1**—Modern Machine Shop Practice. **2**—Blue Print Reading and How to Draw. **3**—Calculations & Mathematics for Machinists. **4**—Shop Physics. **5**—How to Use the Slide Rule.

ASK TO SEE IT!

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 West 23rd St., New York

Mail AUDELS MACHINISTS & TOOLMAKERS HANDY BOOK, Price $4 on 7 Days Free Trial. If O. K. I will remit $1 in 7 days and $1 Monthly until $4 is Paid. Otherwise I will return it.

Name_____

Address_____

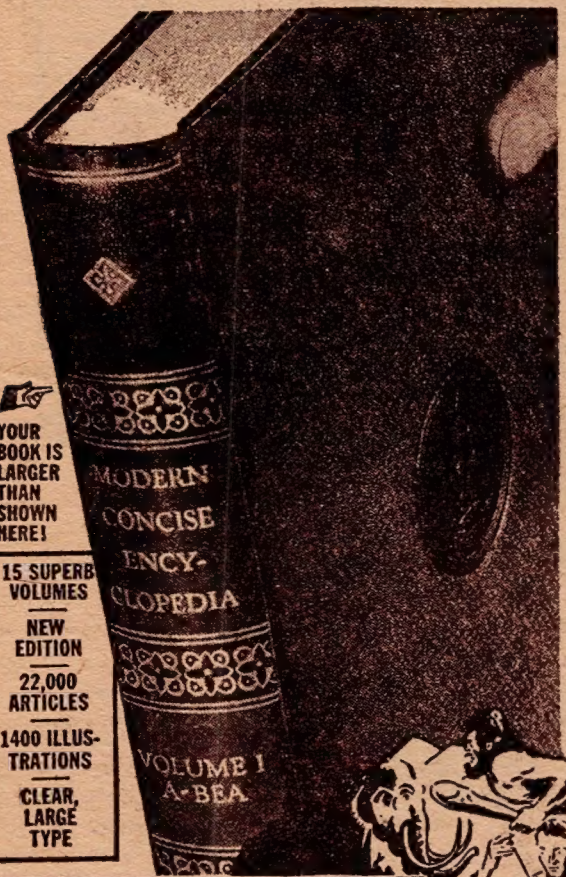
Occupation_____

Reference_____

HAM

Amazing Gift Offer to READERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

VALUABLE ENCYCLOPEDIA VOLUME WORTH $3.00 YOURS for only 7¢ - AND A 3¢ STAMP



YOUR BOOK IS LARGER THAN SHOWN HERE!

15 SUPERB VOLUMES

NEW EDITION

22,000 ARTICLES

1400 ILLUSTRATIONS

CLEAR, LARGE TYPE

NO STRINGS! NO CATCHES! NOTHING TO BUY!

Yes, the valuable book pictured here is OUR GIFT TO YOU, and all you need to do to receive it is simply to mail in the Gift Coupon below at left, enclosing only the small cost of mailing the book to you. Then, as soon as we receive your Coupon, we mail you this important 224-page book—Volume One of the MODERN CONCISE ENCYCLOPEDIA in the very latest edition! We send it to you without charging you one penny of what the volume cost us. And more! If you desire, after examining your gift volume, we give you the privilege of receiving the rest of the big, fifteen-volume set ALMOST AS A GIFT!

Finest Concise Encyclopedia in America—Newest Edition

Imagine owning a beautiful, brand-new edition of the finest concise encyclopedia in America at NEXT TO NO EXPENSE! Books BIGGER than full library-size, handsomely bound in deep green cloth, stamped in red, and gilded—expensively made volumes you will be proud to own . . . That is a dream come true for untold thousands of wide-awake, intelligent American families.

A Necessity for Every Home

Here is an encyclopedia written for YOU—to find in an instant the information you seek on History, Biography, Medicine, Industry, Finance, Music, Religion, and 22,000 MORE subjects—illustrated with pictures, maps, and photographs made for this edition—a rich mine of information giving you more usable FACTS than the average college education!

Every subject, written by high authorities, is in concise, easy-to-understand language, so you can grasp information at a glance. Everything is so crystal-clear that even your children will find these volumes an invaluable aid in their schoolwork—and you, too, will use them every day of your life. No books in the whole world are more of a NECESSITY for every home!

14 More Books—Practically a Gift

When you receive your gift Volume One, you become entitled to an EXTRA PRIVILEGE. We reserve in your name the rest of the fifteen volumes. And—unless you wish to cancel the reservation after examining your gift volume—you can receive the other volumes, one each week as they come off the presses.

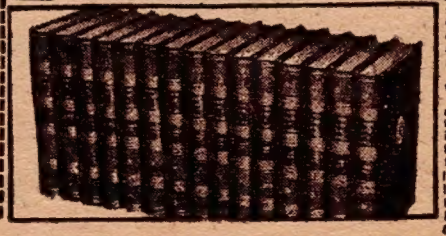
But you will not be charged for these volumes at their usual high cost—merely a privilege price that is just a fraction of their value—a price so small every reader will know he is receiving them ALMOST AS A GIFT!

Remember these are **genuine encyclopedias**—books ordinarily selling at prices so great as to be beyond the reach of the average family. They are the books every man and woman needs as an unparalleled aid in business and in social life—that every parent, every wage earner, every student has always wanted to own!

HOW EVERY READER GETS A GIFT BOOK

Fill in and mail the Gift Coupon at left, enclosing 7c and a 3c stamp (or 10c in coin). This is to cover only the cost of handling and mailing the book to you. The book itself is FREE—our gift to you to enable you to decide whether you want the rest of the set or not.

At the same time we reserve the other 14 volumes in your name, giving you the privilege of receiving these volumes as they come off the presses. You can cancel this reservation if you wish, after you receive and examine your gift book. But if you decide not to cancel the reservation, you will receive the remainder of the set at the rate of one book each week, paying the postman the SPECIAL GIFT PRICE — only 79c per volume, plus a small mailing charge — and NO MORE!



Send in for your gift volume TODAY.

Remember that costs of materials and manufacture are climbing so rapidly we cannot guarantee to keep this amazing offer open more than a limited time. And we have only limited quantities on hand. So DON'T DELAY. Send in the Gift Coupon AT ONCE!

READERS' ENCYCLOPEDIA GIFT COUPON

BOOK GIVE-AWAY PLAN
P. O. BOX NO. 56
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Enclose 7c and 3c stamp (or 10c coin) to cover mailing cost.

Please send me my gift Volume One of the Modern Concise Encyclopedia. I enclose 7c and 3c stamp (or 10c coin) to cover mailing cost on my gift book. Please also reserve the balance of a set in my name. After I examine my gift Volume One, I can cancel this reservation; otherwise you may send me the rest of the set at the rate of a volume a week, and I will pay the postman C.O.D. the SPECIAL GIFT PRICE of only 79c a volume (plus a small mailing charge) and NO MORE!

VOLUME ONE IS MINE TO KEEP IN ANY CASE

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY & STATE 58-A

Copyright 1943 Book Give-Away Plan, N. Y.

THE KID GOES GUN-WOLF

A Quick-Trigger Novel

By

T. W. Ford

★ ★

In the broken hills behind Durango, a lobo had his gun-bets coppered with a stolen girl. And Bat Butcher was ripping the lid off Hell as a terrified father and an intimidated town stood with shooting irons shackled. Then the Silver Kid slapped his shell sign on one of the killers and decided to draw cartridges in the bloody game. But he had to go to jail and borrow a wanted man's name before he could really ride the trigger trail . . .

★ ★

★ The Kid Goes Gun-Wolf ★

A Smashing New Novel

By T. W. Ford

IT WAS raining in hard rifling splinters of water. They made a rattling sound bouncing off Solo Strant's slicker as he swung into Durango. He crossed the bridge over the gurgling creek in the darkness, passed under a huge eucalyptus tree and moved down the main street. It seemed quiet enough. Then he found his fingers caressing that tiny silver skull joining his sombrero strings at his throat. And that involuntary gesture was a sure-fire sign of blood due on the moon.

He slipped a hand across his body to one of those twin silver-stocked guns slung butt foremost on his hip. Strant, the Silver Kid, was a cross-arm draw gunslinger. Then he chuckled on the night and dropped his hand away as he passed a General Store. There the proprietor was putting up the shutters for the night. The Kid was at the corner of a side road when he thought he heard one of the shutters bang with a hard flat sound through the rain. There was another report seconds later. Solo glanced back over his shoulder. The proprietor was staring his way, revealed in the glow from his store windows.

There was something wrong. Solo sensed it. Down the side street he saw the sign of a big gambling hall named the Mustang. Even as he glanced at it through the wind-swirled rain, a handful of men flung open the double doors and came backing out. Then there was that flat bang, muffled by the spatter of the rain, again. Only this time the Kid knew it was a gun. He saw its muzzle flash in the hand of one of that bunch. There was a torn cry of pain from somebody in the gambling place.

It was a holdup. And Solo Strant went into action inside of a split second. But he had overlooked that watcher in the shadows down by the corner of the gambling hall. The watcher had spotted the Kid though. As he fed the spur steel to his paint pony, Sorghum, the other rushed his cayuse out into the road. Two slugs ripped by the Kid's hat. Solo was just clearing his left gun from its scabbard. It caught momentarily on his slicker. He tried to swing the paint horse clear.

But the other rode crashing into him. The slight Kid was hurtled from the saddle as his animal, taken on the flank, was batted off its feet. Solo struck in the mud, skidded on his chest through the soggy weeds of the gutter. And then his head came up sharply against the base of a post. He was knocked half out, badly stunned.

He heard the crash of guns and the screams of men around him. A stray slug jetted the mud inches from a leg as he sat there helpless for seconds. "Let 'em go —let 'em go, for the love of Gawd!" somebody was shouting.

Solo Strant scrambled to his feet, had both guns out and cocked. He spat salty tasting blood from a lip gash, slid forward with that cat-like tread and crouch he used when he went into action. The road in front of the Mustang was a vortex of men whose outlines were blurred by the rain. The hold-up bunch had their horses but were backing down toward the main road as they led them, presenting a solid front to the gambling hall crowd. Two hombres toted money sacks packed with dinero.

The Kid was about to cut loose with his hoglegs. And one of the outlaws sang out: "Hold your fire—or something'll happen to the girl!"

Solo Strant's thumbs froze on the eared-back gun hammers. He couldn't risk loosing a hail of hot lead in that tricky light if they had a girl as hostage. He crouched beside the stairs of a darkened store, furious with impatience. Two of the hold-up gang detached themselves, swung up into the saddle. The Kid's twin guns crackled hotly, bucking in his small but deadly hands.

One of those men pitched from the kak,

screaming as he clutched at a hit shoulder. The other went up rigid in his stirrups, grabbing at his head. But he managed to whirl his pony and dash out to the intersection of the main road.

The Kid scooted ahead a few yards, sidling into some scrub growth before a burnt-out cabin. He held an advantage as long as they couldn't locate him. The outlaw leader yelled about what would happen to the girl again. Through the curtain of rain, Solo glimpsed the bunch at bay in the entrance to the gambling hall.

"Let 'em go—it's the Butcher bunch!" a man there roared in a throaty froglike voice. Solo picked him out. His body fitted his voice. He was crippled, having just stumps short of his knees for legs. He had a mane of iron-gray hair over a great square face with heavy shoulders. The Kid saw how he got those shoulders when he swung himself down the gambling hall steps, walking on his arms. He clutched a couple of rockerlike blocks of wood with leather straps which served his hands as shoes. He was Judge Hondo Race. He whipped out a gun as he bellowed to the gambling hall crowd again.

SOLO STRANT couldn't savvy it. He was playing his own hand in his own way, solo, as usual.

Everybody was shouting. One of the outlaws sent a couple of shots high through the doorway of the Mustang. The man limned himself in the glow of the coal-oil lamp inside a moment. Solo saw there was no girl near him. Fired. Again. His second slug tore through the hombre's leg, dropping him. The Kid could have drilled him dead center. But he hated bloodshed and killing, always avoided the latter when possible.

His two shots had given away his position. One of the lobos screamed warning. They whirled as they retreated, two more now in the saddle. They sought him out in the rain and the yellow sheen of his slicker gave him away. Guns were winking at him through the gloom. Wicked singing lead sliced the brush around him. A hunk of it opened up a sleeve of his slicker. He was darting and ducking, flitting from spot to spot. He fired back twice. Heard a man curse in pain.

Then a bullet knifed open Solo's right forearm and his gun in that hand sagged. He sighted a tall man looming out of the rain. And he was the leader with the girl entertainer from the gambling place. He held her in her spangled frock in one great arm, almost wholly shielding him. He was a stoop-shouldered gent with bulging black eyebrows that were fearsome. It was plain he was on the kill trail.

The Kid didn't really have a chance unless he wanted to take a chance on at least wounding the girl. He lunged sideward as the outlaw shot again. A light flashed on in a window behind Solo. He was in a tight. Daringly he dived straight forward, felt a slug breeze by his cheek. He landed on his chest, got an elbow propped up.

The outlaw leader lunged forward to shoot downward. The struggling girl tore herself half away. And Solo had a glimpse of the other man's shooting arm. The Kid triggered. And the outlaw reared back, Colt flying from his fingers, arm flinging upward. Blood spurted from a welt of a bullet track across the back of that hand. The Kid's slug had creased him.

The gun ruckus was as good as over. The gambling hall girl ripped free and fell in the mud. The big lobo with the beetling brows swung and ran alongside a horse, hauled himself into the leather. The bunch high-tailed it. Jumping up, Solo slammed the trigger of his left-hand gun at them until it clicked empty. It was only then he thought of the flesh wound in his right forearm. Crimson dripped down onto his hand.

He pulled off his neckerchief, yanked up his slicker and shirt sleeve, got the bandana knotted around the torn flesh. Then he cursed himself softly for not thinking of his horse. He was still slightly stunned from that fall. But by the time he found the paint calmly grazing in an alley down by the corner, it was too late for successful pursuit in that rain.

Still baffled by the way the townsmen had been cowed, he led the animal back toward the scene of the shooting fray. The two men he had wounded were prisoners, herded in by the crowd. Some men rushed up to shake the Kid's hand and congratulate him. Judge Hondo Race came swinging along the wooden sidewalk on his arms with the wooden blocks for boots. His face was pale with fury.

"That was Butcher's bunch—some of 'em, anyway," he roared. "You shouldn't have done that! You shouldn't have!"

"Easy, Judge! Easy." A big cow waddy

came up, leading a horse. He had shoulders big as a couple of barn doors. With an easy swooping motion, he plucked the irate Judge from the ground and swung him up into the saddle. The Judge waved a huge fist at him from atop the horse.

Solo was dumbfounded. He was wondering if this Judge could possibly be an outlaw himself. "That was a holdup, wasn't it?" He stood with his slicker fallen open.

"You're Strant, the Silver Kid, aren't you?" a newcomer said, his eyes running over the Kid's rig.

Solo nodded. "Marshal here?" he said as he noted the star on the calfskin vest hastily buttoned over a tucked-in nightshirt.

The town marshal extended a hand. "Yep. Durkee's the handle, Strant. Right sorry I couldn't get here soon enough to lend you a hand. No sense in trying to track 'em in this rain anyways." He turned to call orders to a deputy who was taking two prisoners down the line to the jail with the aid of some of the crowd. The latter were very tough-talking now.

"Plenty of others round-abouts who must have sound-heeled boots from sidestepping trouble," the Kid said stiffly in anger. "They didn't try to do anything."

The marshal rubbed his gray-stubbled beard. "Not much we can do against Bat Butcher's outfit these days." He suggested the Kid come down to the jailhouse and get his wound properly tied up.

THE Kid nodded, then looked back toward the main road in the rain, the way the Butcher hombres had gone. Maybe the local folk thought they couldn't do much. But Solo knew he had put his bullet brand on the tall beetling hombre. And that gun sign had never yet failed to be fatal, sooner or later, to its wearer.

Down in the two-story jailhouse, after the pair of prisoners had been locked up on the top floor, Solo had his arm bound up. It was a painful but not a dangerous wound. Durkee brought out a bottle of redeye. They had just emptied a glass when Judge Race was borne in by his powerful cowhand.

As the marshal told Solo afterward, the latter's name was John Bird. He seemed shy in correspondence to his hulk. He put his boss down in a chair, nodded without speaking, and edged over against the wall. He stood with his massive arms folded on his chest, legs spread wide. When anybody looked at him, he half nodded and rubbed his flattened nose. Solo noted that he wore a single .45 slung loosely on a hip. The last thing he looked like was a gun-wolf.

The Judge pounded the desk with one of his muscled hands. "I don't want any tricks, Durkee," he said harshly. "Butcher himself wasn't in that hold-up crowd anyway. So nabbing 'em wouldn't have helped any. And—"

"We could get word through to Butcher, maybe, that his men'll be killed if he doesn't return your girl," Durkee suggested mildly.

"No—no-o!" the Judge roared. "He won't give a hang for the hides of a couple of his gunslingers. He's got more'n a few to spare, anyway. Let me get my girl back first. I'll pay off—and then—" He bowed his head, mouth twitching, eyes closing apparently in grief.

"Reckon there ain't much else I can do anyways," the marshal admitted.

"All right." The Judge swore huskily. "If I only had my own legs I'd take the trail against that—well, I haven't." He made a signal to John Bird behind him. "Guess we can go now, Legs." That last was his own bitter name for the man who had to carry him around. He flashed Solo a long intense look, nodded curtly. John Bird picked him up.

It was a saddening lugubrious thing to watch. It was like some fantastic nightmare of a prematurely aged child. Bird lugged him down the steps, held the Judge a moment so he could stare up and down the street, then placed him in the saddle. They rode off, one of the Judge's mighty calloused hands hooked around the saddle horn to steady himself.

"That sure is sad," said the Kid peeling off his slicker in the humid low-ceiled room.

Durkee nodded and refilled both glasses from the bottle. "Squat and I'll give you the story. I've heard plenty about your hell-fired gunning in my time. But even you couldn't do much here."

They sat and he surveyed the famed Kid with his rep for riding the toughest trails solo, single-handed. At a passing glance, the Kid might have been just another sleepy-eyed work-dodger drifting down the line to a new job. The all-black outfit he was wearing was rusty with age, trail-stained, oft-patched. His black boots were runover, cracked. His black sombrero was weather-warped, boasting a few bullet nicks as well.

But what had led Marshal Durkee to recognize him at the first glance was the silver trappings of his rig. His dull-rowelled spurs were fashioned from Mexican silver dollars. The flaps of his brush-scarred batwing chaps were adorned with big silver conchas. The twin Colts he was deftly reloading now had butts of the same metal. A double row of silver buttons ran down the front of his black shirt. The hatband was silver studded as well. And the final ornament was a gristly little skull of silver that hung at his throat, uniting his sombrero strings. It looked almost real. More than one present occupant of some Boot Hill could remember that as his last sight on this earth before death snarled out at him from the Kid's gun-smoke.

Solo Strant himself was positively innocuous looking. He was a little half-pint of a figure, wasp-waisted, with a boyish face. Locks of ragged black hair fell down over his forehead. He had a way of speaking in a soft voice that was barely more than a distinct whisper when he was crowding trouble. His dark eyes, always sleepy looking, became more so when he was on the verge of making a play. Still, it was hard to believe he was as dangerous as the coldest-blooded killer when the chips were down.

Durkee's glance came back to the silver skull. That erased any of his doubts. He pulled his eyes away, drained off his drink.

"The poor Judge is half locoed because his daughter's been rustled off—kidnapped. Bat Butcher, the outlaw, has her. Demanding twenty-five thousand dollars."

The Kid whistled softly. "Sure is a heap of dinero."

"The Judge is right crazy about that girl, Lily. You see, she's the only thing he's got left in his life. And he's had a bitter time of it. Yes-siree. Known him for years and years."

THE trouble started way back when he got to feuding with Al Baron, one of the old-timers on the Durango range. A ruthless man and a cow-thief in the bargain, Durkee said. Finally, Judge Race and Baron met and gunned it out from horseback. Race's horse was wounded and reared over backward, pinning him beneath it. It had caused the amputation of both his legs, crippling him in the bloom of life. He paused to accept the sack of makings the Kid offered.

Solo rolled a quirly swiftly, let the blue-gray smoke drift from his nostrils. "Maybe-so this Baron's got a hand in this present thing?"

Durkee shook his head. Al Baron had been dead for some years. "We found him shot in the back as he sat at the desk in his office out at his ranch. Happened at night." Solo asked if they had found the killer. The marshal shook his head. They hadn't tried too hard. Baron had been thoroughly hated. "Race was out because he was crippled. Probably some small two-bit rancher he had cheated or stolen from."

Despite his handicap and working tremendously, Hondo Race had built himself a great outfit after that. Grown wealthy. And he was such a decent hombre he had even arranged for the support of Baron's unmarried sister following his enemy's death.

"That's how-come Race got called 'Judge,'" Durkee said, musing. "Things were pretty rough out there in them times. A heap of rustling. Indians. But a man got in a bad spot, hit trouble, and Judge Race was always willing to lend him a hand. Fella had his winter hay burned out and Hondo Race would hand him a chunk of dinero to tide him over. Never known to ask for it back, either."

He built up such a reputation for square-dealing that men came to him to settle their disputes just as if he were a court. A man would bet his last cent on Hondo Race's honesty. And the dinero never seemed to mean anything to him. After his wife's death, the sole thing he really cared about was this daughter, now kidnapped.

Solo nodded through cigaret smoke. Durkee said again how everybody in the town loved and respected the Judge.

"Then why don't they form a posse and track down this Bat Butcher and get the girl back?" the Kid inserted quietly.

"That's just it," the marshal said. "Minute Race got the ransom note, he rode in to town and said as how he didn't want any posse or anything. Begged me not to take a step. He was so all-fired scared that Butcher would kill the girl if we ever cornered him. The Judge said he meant to pay off and get back his girl first." He went on to tell how Race had a man coming in from some cattle syndicate to see about buying most of his place. Last year they'd had the big drought. The bank, through Race who owned a chunk of it, had

loaned money to outfits, sat holding a heap of paper now. Things weren't so good. "He'll have to sell most all to get that kind of dinero now."

The Kid was becoming impatient. For several moments now he had sensed a false piece in the pattern, something in the story that rang falsely. "You're the Law here, Durkee. Why couldn't you form a posse and—"

Durkee was already shaking his head. "Not a chance. Butcher hides out up in the hills to the southwest. Probably could find him. But I'd be walking in there practically single-handedly!" Half the town was directly indebted to Judge Hondo Race in one form or another. They wouldn't do anything, such as forming a posse, against his wishes. "There are some young bucks around here who've got the nerve. But the Judge has been mighty free last few days about buying drinks and making personal loans. Nope."

"First time Butcher's boys pulled a raid like tonight?" the Kid wanted to know.

Durkee shook his head sadly. It wasn't. They had grown mighty arrogant now that they knew they held a hostage like Lily Race. Held up a couple of riders three days ago just outside of town. Before that they had raided the little settlement down the line, taking cash from several stores.

"The way things begin to shape up now," the marshal said, "I don't reckon they're in any too much of a hurry to get the ransom money from the Judge."

Solo asked if any prisoners had been taken before. Durkee admitted they had got one at the settlement. But Butcher had threatened harm to the girl. Judge Race had sent a whole freighter wagon of food into that settlement one bad winter. "I guess they sorta let that prisoner get away."

Solo was up and pacing. The more he heard, the less he liked it. He was thinking of the tall beetle-browed killer who had used a helpless dancing girl as a bullet shield. The Kid could have some respect for a wire-tough killer who had the nerve to stand up, face his man, and smoke it out. But the kind who would use a woman as a shield . . . just as Bat Butcher himself was doing in another form. . .

He indicated the prisoners upstairs with a jerk of his chin. Durkee didn't speak for several minutes, poured himself another drink. Then he admitted that he fully expected some kind of an attempt to be made by Butcher to get his men out. "I'm practically alone here," he said with a shrug.

"You're the Law," Solo said coldly. "And the Law is going to smell like a polecat's boudoir if they can go on with jobs like that Mustang holdup tonight." He walked over to a window. The rain had ceased and a low scimitar of moon was perched atop the trees on the rise to the north. "This John Bird—Legs. . . What about him?"

"USED to be just a post-hole digging bunkhouse hand. I guess the Judge picked him for his present job 'cause he is so big. Goes everywhere Race goes—just like his shadow. Guess Race demands he never be out of arm's reach. Bird is a sort of foreman out there at the Judge's Leaning-R now."

The Kid sucked another quirly down to a coal as he pondered. Durkee said something about being glad to put him up for the night. "I guess we'll just have to wait till Race pays the ransom. Even you couldn't do anything, Strant, and—"

There were footsteps on the little porch outside. In a flash, the Kid had scooped up his yellow slicker and cat-footed into the dark hallway running toward the rear of the place. He gave the marshal a quick signal, shaking his head as he placed his fingers across his lips. He moved from sight.

Three townsmen came in, talking about the gun battle. They asked about the little gunman who had wounded two of them, meaning the Kid himself. Durkee was pretty smart. He mumbled something about him having gone out for some grub. The trio left after a drink.

"What's the idea?" Durkee asked when the Kid returned to the jail's front room.

"I think I've got a way to get to Butcher and find Lily Race," Solo said dreamily, tapping his slicker significantly.

Durkee bridled. "If this is your idea of a good joke—"

Solo walked over past the pot-bellied stove to where "wanted men" and reward handbills were tacked on the wall. He selected one, tapped it. From the description, he gathered the man named on it was short and dark like himself. The wanted man was named Pard Fisher. He was wanted for a cool five thousand, dead or alive, charged with three killings plus two robberies.

"This sweet little polecat—know any-

thing about his whereabouts today?" Solo asked.

Durkee came over and squinted at it. "Pard Fisher. Saw the little rat 'bout eight-nine years back. Only thing that would ever call him pardner would be a sidewinder. Vicious as a hellion." He shook his head. "Last I heared of him he'd slipped down into Old Mexico and vanished. That was nigh five years ago. He never operated in these parts."

"That makes it perfect," Solo said.

"What?"

The Kid indicated his slicker. "When anybody saw me tonight, I was in this. Even the gents I was swapping lead with. Nobody got a good look at me. Or at these silver fixings. And I can take those off." He was already undoing his sombrero strings, removing the famed silver skull and dropping it in a pocket. He liked to have that skull close to him always. "Now you lend me a shirt without silver buttons and I'm ready."

"For what?"

"To stage a fake gunfight out in the street here against you, get jailed, and help those Butcher men escape," the Kid said matter-of-factly.

"You mean—"

"I mean I'm dealing 'em so they'll accept me and take me into Bat Butcher's camp where Lily Race is. Sabe? Pretty simple."

Durkee gasped, took a long breath, then picked up the redeye bottle to pour a drink. "A man sharing a saddle with Death deserves a right stiff shot before he goes, Strant!"

It had to be handled perfectly to put it over with these two Butcher men in the upstairs jail cells. Solo Strant realized that. He was as good as putting his head in a noose. Only men of Bat Butcher's breed usually preferred a six-gun; it was quicker.

It was quiet in the town by then. Between the rain and the holdup, Durango had closed up early. Out on a hill, a dog barked mournfully. Solo pried over one of the door shutters of the General Store, waited with his gun barrel poised. Durkee's low whistle came down the night. Then it happened in rapid sequence. Solo shattered the window pane with his Colt. The marshal let out a yell, fired a bullet into the air as the Kid leaped off the porch like an interrupted thief trying to escape.

Solo wore a red checkered shirt now, lent him by Durkee. The marshal had also found a high-crowned gray sombrero that made him look taller. On top of that, they had decided that a ring of rough-torn bandaging around his head would add to his disguise.

The Kid cut toward his horse standing down the street, ground-anchored in the shadow of a wooden awning. "Git away from that crowbait—or I'll drill you!" Durkee roared as the Kid moved through moonlight. Coming up behind the marshal on the other side of the street, his deputy cut loose.

Solo paused once to return the shots, then ducked down an alley beside the General Store. Windows were slamming up, lights winking on.

"He's trying to sneak away in back," Durkee bellowed.

Out in the rear, as had been previously arranged with the marshal, Solo made for the back of the long Mustang. A swamper poked his head out a rear door of the place but hauled it back in when a stray slug gnashed the clapboards over him. And the deputy came slipping down the side of the gambling hall. Some of his shots were almost too close for comfort.

RETREATING through the back yards, triggering like a cornered man as he went, the Kid worked out into the brush behind the jail itself. He knew those two prisoners could view the gun battle from their cells.

He got into a shallow dry wash, running under the moon as if wounded and spent, diving from sight. Durkee dashed across the upper end of the gully and into a stand of cottonwoods to get him in a cross-fire. The firing went on for a couple of minutes. Then Solo, yelling as if hit, threw out his guns and called that he surrendered. They closed in on him from back and front. Durkee ordered him out with his hands up. Solo obeyed, cursing.

When they moved up beside him, there seemed to be a short struggle. Solo went to his knees as if dropped by the blow of a Colt barrel. "If I hadn't run outa shells—you'd never got me!" he howled.

"Pard Fisher!" cried the marshal. "As I live and die! Been looking for you a long time, Fisher! Come along!"

Hombres began to come running when they saw the John Law prodding the prisoner toward the back door of the jail. The trio hurried. A few men got close. One

said he could see right off Solo was Fisher. The man was one who had witnessed the gunfight before the Mustang. It was almost funny.

"You're locoed! I ain't this Fisher—whoever he is," the Kid feigned angry protest.

"We'll show you your picture on a handbill inside, Mister Fisher," the marshal sneered. They got him inside, barring the door to the others. Then, after a few minutes, he was taken upstairs like any other prisoner. Spitted on Durkee's Colt, he moved past the cells of the two Butcher men. They had their faces glued to the bars of their doors to see him.

"Don't go pushing me," Solo snarled at his captor. "Trying to knock my hat off, huh?"

He was put in a front cell on the right. Durkee went back downstairs and loudly boasted to some folks out in the road how he had caught Pard Fisher trying to rob the General Store. Then he could be heard giving his deputy instructions as he prepared to go home for the night.

One of the Butcher men—his name was Olmsted—peered down the upper floor corridor in the moonlight. "You really Pard Fisher?"

Solo snorted. "Well, guess there ain't no harm telling you the truth. Sure. I won't be here come mornin' anyway!"

The man across the hall said, "You think you're going to get out, Fisher? Hell, they'll hang you an hour after daybreak with one of them sixty-second juries."

"You know me?" Solo asked, voice guarded.

"Nope. But I heard a few things about you," the second Butcher gunfighter said. "You ain't no lily in the eyes of the Law."

Solo let out his breath. "They can't keep me in no leaky jail like this," he said. "Why do you think I didn't want him to knock off my hat? Hell, I got a derringer cached out in the crown." It was one the marshal had given him from his collection of captured hoglegs.

The first Butcher hombre whistled low. Solo said later he'd get the deputy up there. "How about taking us along, Pard?"

The Kid laughed coldly. "I ain't taking no two-bit cow-thieves or tinhorns along with me."

"Yeah?" one of them came back. "We held up the gambling hall in this town tonight!"

"Didn't come off so good, did it?" Solo jeered.

"Rest of the bunch walked out with plenty of dinero. Some little shootin' fool of a stranger horned in or we'd uh been all right. And we will be yet, too. We ride with Bat Butcher's bunch."

The Kid pretended to be unimpressed. "I've been down south of the Border for quite a piece. Ain't heard of him. Butcher, huh?"

The second man said, "He's one of the biggest in these parts. And we got a nice little layout rigged up here. We got the deadwood hung on this whole piece of country. Maybe Bat could use a gent like you."

"You slip out and you'll only have a posse on your coattails," the other Butcher gunhand put in. "Take us along and we'll see you're in a safe hideout pronto prontito."

Solo Strant paced his cell as if weighing the matter. He smoked down two quirlies. Finally he came back to the barred door, whispered, "All right. 'Bout an hour now, I'll get that lunkheaded deputy up here."

He went back, drew off his boots, and stretched out on the cot in his cell. The blankets stunk. He thought briefly of his next moves. Then he dozed off. With his iron nerves, no future threat could bother him until the moment came to face it. In an hour almost to the minute, he was off the bunk. He began to moan as if in mortal pain. His groans became yelps. He banged on the door bars with a tin mug.

"I'm dying! I'm dying," he cried. "My head's on fire. You dirty law dogs'd let a poor devil bleed to death! I'm dyin'!"

THE deputy could be heard clumping around below. He called that he was bringing up a bucket of water. When he did arrive, Solo was back on his bunk, rolling and clawing at his head. With a rasping of the key, the deputy came in. Solo glided over to him in the darkness. Though it was all prearranged, it had to be acted out convincingly.

"Get 'em up—this derringer's got two slugs, Johnny Law!" Solo barked. The deputy half cried out. "Gimme that hogleg of yours!" Solo added. When he took it, there was a noise like a dull thud. It sounded like gun steel over a skull to the Butcher pair. They heard the deputy's body slump to the floor.

A couple of minutes later, Solo stepped out. "Trussed him up and gagged him, the dirty coyote," he told them as he unlocked their cells. He swivelled the deputy's six-gun. "No double-crossing, you gents."

Olmsted shook his head vigorously. "Why should we? Bat Butcher can use a fella like you fine, Pard."

Downstairs, playing out his role, the Kid retrieved his weapons and gun-belts, girded them crisscross-fashion about his lean wrist. The Butcher pair got themselves some hog-legs. They slipped out the back, down to the horseshed behind the jail. Solo's paint was there. And so were two other horses with saddles on the pegs. Durkee had attended to that. This escape must not fail.

They led their animals back among the sand-hills for a couple of hundred yards before mounting. When they did ride off, the Kid slipped his hand into his pants pocket to finger the skull. There was no prescience of danger in the offing this time. He did it to reassure himself. He had left his identity as the Silver Kid behind him in Durango. If anything happened to him on the out-trails, he would be playing out his strings as Pard Fisher. The only ones who knew him now knew him as that. . .

It was a couple of hours after sunup when they came to the outlaw camp. It was a temporary hideout in the thick-timbered heavy-brushed Wild Horse Hills to the southwest, rough broken country with sharp-sided gulches and studded with knobby rises. Guards atop one of the knobs had them well covered as they rode in. They dropped down into a little hollow.

Butcher stood up in a little knot of men having breakfast around a campfire. There were a couple of other groups around other fires, more than thirty men in all Solo judged. And in one of those other groups he picked out the big bulging foreheaded man he had gunned it out with in the rain last night. The hombre had a piece of rag tied around his injured hand.

"Howdy, boys," Butcher greeted his two gunhands who had been taken prisoner. "We was just talking about when we'd go back and bust that town apart to get you-uns outa their jail." He was a big man who looked short he was so broad. He had stupid eyes and a thin-lipped suspicious mouth. He had on a yellow shirt over his thick shoulders and cursed when he saw that some of his java had spilled over the cup onto it. Solo recognized him as the typical outlaw type, a physical bully too thick skinned to know much of fear. The kind who hits the owlhoot trails because it seems an easier way of getting along in life.

Olmsted told him about the jail break engineered by the Kid. "This here's Pard Fisher, Bat. The marshal grabbed him last night when he was robbing a store alone. I told him he ought to ride with our bunch. You know what Fisher can do with a smoke-pole."

The outlaw chief pulled himself up to his full height, slinging his coffee into the fire. He hooked a thumb in his belt beside a Colt with a red spade inset on the butt. Glared. "Heard about you, Fisher."

"Lots of folks have," Solo said calmly, measuring his man. He realized that the beetle-browed one had moved over and was staring at him.

"Uh-huh." Bat Butcher threw out his chest. "But I heard about you in a real personal way. You see, you killed my best friend, Charlie Whitten."

The Kid let quirly smoke drift from his nostrils. He had to run a tough bluff this time. "It was sometime back—I can't remember it very clear. But I know he did ask for it. What was I supposed to do—eat crow?"

"No-o." Butcher appeared dubious about his next move. He switched to the tall beetle-browed gent. "What's the matter, Leader."

Leader, bearing the Kid's bullet brand, said nasally. "I got a feeling about this gent. I got a feeling I seen him before."

Solo nodded. "Amigo, I got the same feeling. You look plumb like a tinhorn card-sharp I ran out of Declaration Flats one night."

The circle around the fire tensed. A couple of men gasped. Hands eased holsterward. Solo smiled in that deceptive sleepy manner, hands loose at his sides. He looked lazy. Nobody would suspect how fast he could hook those slim fingers around the gun butts.

Leader glowered, then said sullenly, "I ain't never been no card dealer, Fisher."

SOLO nodded magnanimously. "All right—I'll take your word for it then. You couldn't uh been the hairpin at the Flats."

It was a nip and tuck game. Butcher towered there, brushing at his coat lapel,

weighing it. Solo Strant knew he had a stached gun under that coat. And the Kid, a gun gambler to the core, made his play. His head jerked to the left as if he had heard something back by the trees. Then with a lazy gliding motion that developed into eye-defying swiftness, his hands were jumping crisscross in front of his body, straightening with a gun spiking from each. The wounded right arm was still stiff. He brought the left gun level and was triggering. Twigs chopped off by bullets fell from a low piece of brush over to the left.

Nobody else had a chance to draw. Bat Butcher and another had guns half out of sheaths. And then the Kid, as Pard Fisher, had turned back and was smiling through the acrid gunsmoke. "Thought I saw somebody trying to slip up behind that bush. Sure makes me feel foolish." He holstered his hoglegs casually.

Butcher tried to grin. But he couldn't forget the fact that this Pard Fisher had jumped him and his whole bunch on the draw. He said, "It sure took nerve to meet such a big hombre as Whitten with a knife."

The Kid shrugged. . . . "Big gents bleed just as easily as small ones."

Butcher blinked. "Sure, sure. Come to remember it, Whitten cheated me outa ten dollars once. Guess he had something coming to him. . . . Hey, Joe, get Fisher a cup o' java. How 'bout some grub, Pard?"

Solo knew he was accepted then. He nodded and moved over to unsaddle his pony and picked him out. It gave him a chance for a thorough look-see. And it was plain there was no girl in this camp.

Back at the fire, he squatted down and ate some chow. Then he brought up the matter of the kidnapped girl. "Heard some talk as I drifted down the line, Butcher. Hear you got the Law by the ears—rustled off a girl and got her as a hostage."

Butcher grinned, throwing out his chest again conceitedly. "'S about it. I got brains."

Butcher started to answer, then got a half-scared look. "Don't keep her hereabouts," he said curtly. "I—I wouldn't want anything to happen to her." He got up and moved off. . . .

It was going to be a waiting game; the Kid saw that. He hated inaction. But there was nothing else to do if he meant to find out where they had Lily Race hidden. There was one thing he knew. Something about the whole deal, about the girl, had Butcher scared.

He caught a few hours of shuteye. Late in the afternoon, they mounted and shifted up country to a new camp. There was Bat Butcher's cute little trick, never staying in one place long enough for a posse to track him down. The Kid noticed that Leader was not among them. He didn't dare ask any questions though. A little after they made a new camp in a bosque, a sawed-off redhead freckled up like a turkey egg joined them and was greeted as one of the outfit.

He parleyed a while with Butcher. After that, during the night, there was a lot of drinking with jugs of redeye being passed around freely. Olmsted and another man tangled, the second pulling a knife when Olmsted knocked him to the ground. Butcher leaped into it roaring, struck Olmstead and booted him when he was down. The chief returned to his seat on a stump near the campfire and the riotous drinking went on.

"When're we goin' to hold up a place again, Bat?" one of the men shouted.

"Waiting for word now!" Butcher called back. The man reeled forward, cursing that he wanted action. Butcher rose and towered over him. "You want what Sonny got?" he spat.

The rebellious gunhand swallowed and went away. The Kid, ignored in the shouting and jug-swiggling, moved down beside where Olmsted was hunkered. Solo figured Olmsted might be ready to tell a few things in his truculence. "Does the boss keep this Race girl all for himself?" Way I worked when we rode below the Line, everything was split up amongst the bunch."

Olmsted shook his head. "He's got her hid out somewheres—but he don't even go near her himself. Says it's better if anybody tried to track us down. We still got our hole-ace tucked away." He had to half scream the last as a raucous trio yodelled "The Blue Haze of Texas."

"Maybe he's double-crossing us fellas," Solo prodded him. "He's got the girl—so he can sell out for the ransom dinero without us even knowing it, way I figure."

"Mebbo-so. But something's got Bat scared about her. Y' see, that's what happened to Sonny. He jumped the boss with a gun, demanding the woman. Bat sooner took a chance against the gun. He went

for his and Sonny missed and we fixed him up a nice grave down south further."

THE Kid gave up. And he also put aside his half-formed plan for jumping Butcher when the rest of the camp was bedded down. It was plain the chieftain preferred death rather than revealing something.

One of the guards out in the brush whistled sharply. A man came into the circle of firelight and motioned to the boss. Bat Butcher took a dipper of water from a bucket and dumped it over his head. Then, gun in hand and alone, he moved out of the camp. Solo eased around behind a man who had passed out, a tin cup still in his grip, glided behind the trees, and circled around to trail the chief.

The Kid moved like a cat. But he had to veer around an open moonlight patch as he moved toward the lip of the bosque. He had to watch for the guards too. He got to the rim, moved around a big boulder, and almost ran into Bat Butcher himself. "All right," Butcher said to a horseman. "Adios."

Solo was just too late. The rider had already swung his horse about. He wore a sombrero pulled low over his face and the collar of his coat was turned up. Moonlight seeped through the trees. The crouched Solo knew there was something familiar about him. But he couldn't recognize him from the rear.

"So we hit the train at Tollan Junction tomorrow," Butcher said to a sentry nearby. The two of them made their way back down into the bosque.

The outlaw boss was telling his men about it when the Kid worked in unobtrusively from the other side of the clearing. "I'm too smart for 'em," Butcher bragged. "Judge Race has some dinero, for that last herd he shipped, coming in. Figgered to be wise and put it in the bank at the Junction where it'll be safer. We're grabbing it afore it gits to the bank. We can hit in other places before Durango. Ha-ha."

"How're we going to jump the train?" a man asked.

Butcher took a drink from a jug. "Come over here, Leader." The beetling-browed hombre shuffled up. And the two hunkered down to talk it over quietly. Leader began to draw with a twig in the dirt. They were still talking as the bunch bedded down.

In the gray mist-wreathing dawn over java around the fire, Butcher told the plan. The train bearing the payment to Race got into the Junction at noon. They would strike it as it pulled into the station.

"They'll have bank guards and some John Laws at the depot, won't they?" Olmsted asked.

"Shut up," Butcher flung at him.

Leader spoke in his nasal tones as he drew out a greasy pack of cards. "Two of the boys'll stage an orey-eyed gun duel down in the middle of the town," he said. "It'll have everybody watchin'. Make it plenty locoed and nobody'll interfere."

"Them two'll have a nice job makin' their getaway," a gent said.

"'S up to them. We'll cut for it like we always do," Butcher ordered. He motioned them to line up.

Hunkered by a tree stump, Leader shuffled, set up the deck. Two men cut. One with a ten-spot but winning as his opponent came up with a deuce. Two more men split the cards against each other. Solo saw that neither the boss nor Leader were going to be in on the thing. The Kid's turn came as he faced the loser of the last cut. The loser came up with a queen of diamonds. Solo drew a puny trey.

In the next cut, the Kid had the right to select his card first. He did but came up with another trey. His opponent chuckled as he turned over a spade ace. Again the Kid had first cut. This time he outdid himself, bringing out a deuce. A jack whipped him easily.

"Having a heap of bad luck, Pard," Butcher said.

Solo nodded, boyish face blank as a Sphinx. Those long deft fingers of Leader's were not fooling him. The boss' lieutenant was cold-decking him. But the sharp-witted Kid had already seen the way to take advantage of that. He meant to use it.

"You draw first," he said as the last man came up. Leader's eyes smiled under his thick brows. The other man split the deck and came up with another spade ace. Solo made a surrendering gesture. "Guess I'm elected, gents."

Two other men who had drawn low cards drew against each other. And it was settled. Solo and the one known as Red, who had joined them as they came into the new camp last night, would stage the

sham orey-eyed gun duel. The Kid figured it as his chance to break up the holdup. . . .

THE sun was a coppery globe in the dead center of the sky when the Kid and Red crossed the rail tracks and passed the depot in Tollan. It was a fairly big town with a lot of new buildings of fresh-cut wood still lacking paint. Red chucked an empty pint redeye bottle into the gutter. He had been building up his courage. "Swell chance we got to get out with our hides," he muttered.

The Kid fingered the minute silver skull in his pocket. "Save some ammunition and we might make it." They drew up before a hitch-rack. The wooden sidewalks were fairly crowded and only a few hombres gazed at them idly. The stage that would meet the train and take passengers the rest of the route down the trail was waiting before the hotel. From up the valley came the hoot of the train whistle.

"Sounds like she's going to be a few minutes late," a man said as he came out of a bar.

Solo was studying the layout of the town carefully. He eased around corner, spotted the alley that ran down parallel to the main road to the station yard. They made their plans. The Kid said he would leave his paint there just around the corner.

Dismounted, Solo passed the corner, headed for the saloon with the big sign out front. He was reeling like an orey-eyed waddy as he passed to the shade inside the batwing doors. He slammed a silver dollar down on the counter and bawled out for some gila poison.

"An' the best doggoned gila poison you got!" he mouthed, pulling off his hat and then fumbling it and apparently almost falling flat as he tried to recover it.

"Bunkhouse hand with a month's wages in his jeans," somebody said with a chuckle.

Solo glared his way belligerently. "I'm lookin' for a two-bit double-crossin' pardner who—" he began. Then, slopping his drink as he lifted it, he sighted Red in the saddle over the top of the batwings. "Thar he is, the coyote!" Dropping his glass with a crash, the Kid staggered toward the street, stumbling flat as he went through the doors. Behind him they were guffawing.

Red sighted him and dropped to the ground, swaying as if with a load of redeye aboard himself. "You lowdown no-good saddle-tramp, I'm a-going to blast the daylights outuh yuh!" Red roared.

"Fill yore hand!" Solo hurled back and sent a wild shot that slithered through the leaves of a tall tree down to the left.

Red's gun roar was almost simultaneous. And his shot almost went through his own boot toe. They reeled toward each other, still shouting insults. Tollan, like most new growing frontier towns, was pretty tough. A locoed gunfight like this was something to enjoy. Let 'em blast away so long as no onlookers got too close.

Red fired again and his shot went through the barroom sign over the big door. Solo lunged sideward, stumbled, and sprawled full length in the dust. The three men watching from behind the doors of the hay and feed store on the far side of the street almost split their sides laughing. Solo rolled over and let go a shot skyward. He came up and stumbled closer.

"Hey—don't git too close," Red warned in a hoarse whisper as he pretended to fumble with a second gun. "We can't miss point blank or—"

The Kid was waiting for a certain sound. It came, the blast of the locomotive down the hill letting off steam, the screech of the wheels on the tracks. He heard the engine bell cease its clamor. The Kid acted.

Stepping in, he struck the surprised Red with a gun barrel. Red went down like a felled tree, a trickle of red from a scalp gasp staining the alkali in the road. The Kid whirled and dashed down the road to the corner and around it to his paint. He ran straight and steady and fast. Now if he could hang the deadwood on Bat Butcher's play. . . .

THE first shots spattered from the railroad station even as he hit the leather of the paint horse. And behind him, folks who had been drawn to that end of the town by the seemingly locoed gun duel jerked around to stare vaguely. The puffing of the engine tended to blur the gun reports.

Throwing the spur steel to the horse, he whipped down the alley behind the main road. A man who jumped out of his path at the head of the broad alley yelled something. It sounded like "Pard Fisher." But

the Solo man was too intent on his business to get the significance of it then.

He raced down to the depot yard as fresh shots sounded from there. A station agent, in vest and with fancy baby-blue armbands on his shirt sleeves, came stumbling into the end of the alley, bleeding from a bad head wound. A still smoking .38 dangled from a hand. He had made the mistake of daring to buck the Bat Butcher killers.

One of the latter came around the water tank at the side of the alley and leveled a big Colt on the helplessly wounded man. Solo Strant fired on the dead gallop and that Butcher gunhand never knew who drilled him. Never would as he went down with his chest blasted dead center.

Solo hit the ground sliding, filling his still stiff right hand too. Steam from the engine was blown back into the alley, blinding him as he advanced. Crouched, he waited a moment. Then he saw two of Butcher's band spring out of the door of the freight car with a small metal padlocked box. A mail guard lay in the doorway, shot in the stomach. One of Butcher's men kicked him over to clear the way.

The Kid's deadly Colts spoke their rattling piece in unison. The men bearing the metal chest stumbled and went down. The other bent to get the dinero. But he whipped away as another of Solo's shots ricocheted off the metal hotly.

From the end of the station platform, a bank guard, wounded, there to meet the money, propped himself on an elbow and got in one more shot. It wounded that second outlaw in the mail car entrance, nicking him in the leg. He gave up the game, limping away from the tracks toward a pony.

It wasn't quite over. One of the Kid's guns had snapped empty. On one knee, he was reloading when Bat Butcher at the head of several horsemen swung around the end of the station furthest from the main road. The Kid was caught in a bad spot. But another swirling cloud of steam drifted back along the ground from the locomotive and masked him. Guns muted for the moment, he hugged the ground.

They had swung past around the rear of the little bright yellow depot building when the smutty smoke lifted. Butcher was yelling. Two men came running down from the head of the train toward their ponies. The Kid took a single step backward—a strange thing for him—got behind one of the water tank uprights. And his hoglegs were chanting their coughing death chorus again.

A rider just beside Butcher was smashed from the saddle as if hit by an invisible pole that pried him up and over the horse's neck. Another pony reared and whinnied in pain. The tall Leader grabbed at his hat that had suddenly been vented by a bullet. The riders milled, seeking out the source of the new and lethal attack.

The Kid waited behind the upright. In a vague way he was aware of running and shouting in the alley behind him.

He peeked out. Butcher was roaring madly, waving. They were giving up, not going to make another attempt for the dinero. Preparing to high-tail it. The Kid went to his knees and risked another shot. If he could prevent their escape, help to make a prisoner of the lobo chieftain—then the Law would have something to swap for the freedom of Judge Race's girl. But that last shot was a costly one for the Kid.

A train conductor, who had fled into the depot after being gun-whipped when the holdup started, ran out a door with an old shotgun to get a crack at the retreating outlaws. And Solo's final shot caromed off a post of the platform and smashed into his shoulder.

"Looka him! He just got the conductor!" a voice behind the Kid screamed in the alley.

"It's him—Pard Fisher! He came back with this bunch after he got run outa here last night!" another man shouted.

Solo spun about. The gray Stetson Marshal Durkee had lent him was jammed low over his face. He wore none of his silver trappings save his spurs and Colts now. He had on a checkered shirt instead of his noted black one now, also. "Wait! Wait, you danged lunkheads," he flung at them in the deadly calm voice.

It was like trying to breast a torrent single-handedly. Nobody was in a mood to listen to sense much less an argument in the bargain. Two shots horneted over Solo's head. Somebody flung a rock. A rider came down the alley behind the surging pack.

"He just killed the conductor! It's Pard Fisher!"

"I'm trying to stop the holdup and—" Solo tried once more. From the railroad yard he could hear what was left of the

Butcher bunch pounding away. A slug from the mob nicked his right shoulder.

He was whipped. He triggered twice over their heads and made the saddle of the pint horse. He had seen the gate ajar in the high board fence of a yard on the left of the alley. He slammed through it, crossed the rear yard, threw the Sorghum horse in a leap over the fence at the other side.

LUCK stacked the cards against him once again. The rugged paint made the leap, landed safely. Then it went crashing into a set of sawhorses where some carpenters had been working behind the next-door place. The pony staggered, went to his forelegs, kicked itself clear. They went on up behind the buildings on the side road. A clump of cottonwood stretched down to the cut where the railroad ran. Even as he veered into them, the Kid saw the bunch of horsemen cutting in from the road after him.

He didn't know why they weren't following the bigger Butcher bunch. He couldn't know that when he was in Tollan last night, the real Pard Fisher, in a drunken gunfight, had drilled a mother with a baby in her arms, slaying both. The West had a special hate for men who molested women in any form much less burning them down.

Pounding through the cottonwoods, the paint pony began to let down. The Kid tickled it with his dull-rowelled spurs. The animal tried to respond, but soon bogged down. The Kid realized the pony was limping. The jump into the sawhorses had injured its forelegs.

He crossed the railroad cut, went over the rise on the other side of it. There was a creek flanked by red willows. He murmured a prayer of thanks and dropped off the bank into it, turned downstream. There was a chance he could shake them off for a while. But he knew a bitter showdown was in the offing. On an injured horse, even the tough knotty-legged Sorghum, he couldn't keep ground between himself and them forever....

It had come. Just as he knew it had to. It was late afternoon with the whole barren country lying like a dead thing under a lowering sky. Not a blade of the browned buffalo grass stirred in the windless atmosphere. It was as if time itself had been suspended.

The Kid's face, pinched with strain, was grim-mouthed. He had come down that little valley and out into the wasteland with barely a rise in it, not a single full-sized tree. Just the buffalo grass and an occasional clump of sage. And he had been trapped. Spread in a semi-circle as they closed, forcing him down the valley until its bare sides rose sharply, the posse had him cut off on three sides. Familiar with the country, they had known what they were driving him into.

It was all over. He pushed along on the now badly bogged down pony as fast as he could. One of the men behind let go with another rifle shot at him. They were getting uncomfortably close, those shots. This one was a bare ten feet to the right.

The light was dimming. From the southwest came the belch of lazy thunder. He veered to put a larger clump of sage between himself and his hunters. The paint horse stumbled badly. A few more hours and real darkness and he might have been able to double back on them. Then he moved into a shallow hollow through which a faint trail ran. He had just dropped to the ground to lead his poor horse. At first, he thought it might be some kind of a mirage. Blending with the terrain, one corner fallen in, a small sod hut with a wooden roof stood ahead.

It was the best place for a last stand that offered. The Kid dropped a hand on the paint pony's muzzle. Solo's eyes grew soft a moment. He had been through many a ruckus with the rugged cayuse. Then he stepped away, slapped the animal with his sombrero, and sent it looping wearily away from the scene. No sense in having it cut down by the flying lead. He made it on the dead run to the soddy, kicked open the crumbling door. A slug pumped into it over his head.

Inside there were a few pieces of broken-down rude furniture, three glassless windows in the single room. The rough panes had formerly been filled with oiled paper. Swinging back to the door, the Kid pumped two slugs at the first of the quintet of riders who started to charge down the side of the faint depression. They reined in. He pushed the door closed, then kicked out a narrow slit low in the front wall where there was no window. Thus he would be able to cover all four sides.

He didn't have to wait long. They did

what he expected. Spreading out beyond gunshot, they left their horses. And they came bellying in down the sides of the depression. With steady unhurried regularity, the lead started to chunk into the soddy. One bullet came through the window frame in the rear and almost caught him in the side. The Kid dropped back to all fours as he moved back and forth across the rough dirt floor. He swung to the rear, hat shed, inched his head up.

FATE took a turn his way. Lightning from the nearing storm gouged the darkening sky, lividly fired the countryside. He saw the gent out there wriggling around a boulder. The Kid's gun snarled as it spat two leaden chunks. He heard one ring as it caromed off the stone. He waited, then whirled and ran to the front. His keen ears in the lull had caught the snap of a running man's spurs against a stone. He saw the one on that side zigzagging toward the soddy. Solo sent a bullet buzzing close to his head. These men represented the Law. And he had never bucked the Law yet. He didn't want to kill.

The running hombre dived for the dirt, then crawled back toward a clump of sage. The Kid was almost killed himself. The fifth man had been covering the running one. He blazed away with a steadied rifle as he lay prone in the brown grass.

Fighting desperately, the Kid was ready to gamble. He pulled open the door, hopped out bent double. He took ten steps and then banged away at the riflemen. The latter leaped up, throwing his gun to one side, and legged it for the rim of the little hollow. The Kid got back in with lead snapping at his heels.

A few moments later, he was watching the rear when the lightning raked open the sky again. He saw that posseman crawling back beyond gun range, dragging a hit leg. But the Kid realized time was running short. They had him four to one still. When real darkness came, they could crawl practically plumb to the very walls unseen by him. On top of everything else, his shell belts were fast growing empty.

He caught something like a sigh. Then his hands were full as two shots chunked out a piece of sod and it struck his head, blinding him for several seconds. The man on the north end of the shack almost got in, Solo failing to sight him at first after he had made a daring dash to get behind a flat hummock. The Kid made him retreat. And then he had less than fifteen slugs left for his hot weapons.

A slug nicked his cheek and the precious shells sprayed from his hand. He was down on his hands and knees frantically digging in the rubble for them. He got six and two he dispatched right away out the front.

A man challenged him. "I'm a deputy, Fisher! Better give up. You ain't got but a few shells left."

"I'm not Fisher," the Kid answered hoarsely. "I'm Solo Strant, the Silver Kid: I got the silver skull to prove it—if you know what I'm talking about."

"Sure," a man answered from the left. "But I heard of snakes pertendin' they was that Kid fella before! I saw you—an' your Pard Fisher, yuh danged—"

"Will you take me to Marshal Durkee over at Durango?"

The man in the dimness in front laughed sardonically. "A smart button, huh? Reckon you heard Durkee died uh heart failure early this morning. I suppose he knew you well. Comin' out, Fisher?"

Something went cold inside Solo. That was his last bet. "Come and get me! I still got enough shells left to take a few of you danged fools to Hell's Corral with me."

But he was only bluffing. And they knew, sternly vengeful men, that they were calling his bluff when there was no answer. They were coming. And he was only bluffing because he couldn't blast down honest men backing the Law, even though they were innocently mistaken. He simply couldn't.

There might be another way out, somebody back in Tollan who would know he wasn't the real Fisher. He hoped that happened before a lynch mob decorated a limb with him in a hempen necktie... He pried the door open, took his gun butts foremost. He half lifted his arms. He was ready to surrender.

"All right, I'll—" he began.

BEHIND him in the soddy, a man croaked, "That a posse out there?"

The Kid wheeled, unaware there had been another human in the place. The lightning flared, dyed the interior in a blinding yellow. And he saw the little half-pint figure rolling out from under the debris

of the broken down bunk in the far corner from the door. "Who're you?"

The man sat up, face heavily beard-stubbled. He pawed at his head, at a blood-clotted scalp wound above an ear. "Don't rightly know," he said wearily, voice small. "Seems like I can't quite remember. Some gents was after me. I got wounded. 'S all. My hoss died. 'S all I know...."

He rose groggily, pulling on a crumpled sombrero. "Seems like just now I heard gunnin'. Thought it was a dream first. But there was—and that's a posse outside, ain't it?" An unholy fear made the whites of his eyes glow.

Solo understood what had happened to him. The bullet that had caused that scalp wound must have creased the skull-bone. It had caused a loss of complete memory that might return to any odd moment. Or that never might. "That's a posse," the Kid said.

"They're after you?"

"Yeah," the Kid said. "They think I'm—" He broke off as he caught that faint footstep just outside a few yards. He never did finish the remark.

The other, older but almost his exact size, was close and pawing at him. "Got a posse after me, too. After me...." He pulled the gun from his hip holster. "You was goin' to give up, wasn't you....Yeah ....yeah. Got no shells left?"

"Four," the Kid said.

"Give 'em to me," the other husked. "Quick. They don't know I'm here—and they'll kill me too if they find me."

The Kid hesitated.

"Look, I'll git both uh us away," the other pleaded. "All you gotta do is throw out your smokepoles—and give up. Walk right out. Few feet away, you stop. Then I can cover 'em from the rear and—"

Solo started to shake his head. "I don't want 'em slain—"

"I'll hold 'em up—have the jump on 'em," the other said.

The Kid snapped two slugs out of his right gun, pushed them in the other's hand. It was his one chance. The other tapped him that he was ready. The Kid moved to the door.

"I'm coming out," he called onto the settling night. "I'm surrendering. Here come my guns."

"All right—but no tricks or you're as good as ventilated!" a tough voice from the right warned.

Solo's prized pair of silver-stocked Colts plunked onto the hard earth in front of the soddy. He kicked open the door, hoisted his hands, and walked out. They came around him fast, four. One man ran over him with none too gentle hands looking for a stached weapon. The fifth one of the posse with the wounded leg came riding down with the ponies. He also led the Kid's paint horse.

"Oughta string you right up here and now, Fisher," one of them grunted.

The Kid smiled coolly and maneuvered so he faced the soddy, placing them between him and it. "Anybody got a sack of makin's. I ran out and—"

"Hoist your dewclaws, you John Laws!" the little hombre barked, stepping into the doorway of the shack.

They were taken dead to rights. The skinny leader spun, ready to make a play for it. But Solo slammed his hands down sharply and seized the wrist of the other's gun hand, twisting it till the weapon dropped. The man on the horse swore.

"Git shed of the hardware—or catch it in the back," the stranger who had lost his mind purred. The guns bounced on the ground.

It was a simple matter to take over their weapons and the horses with them lined against the front of the soddy. A slow but thick rain was dropping. It would soon eliminate any trail sign. The Kid swung onto one of the posse ponies, took the bridle of his own paint. The little stranger hopped into the leather of another.

"You'll find your ponies—all 'cept two that we're borrowing and we'll send them in later—up the trail a few miles," the Kid said. "We'll ground-anchor 'em with your guns beside them. Adios, amigos."

THEY moved off. "Could uh dropped a coupla of 'em easy as rolling off a log," the stranger mentioned somewhat sadly. When they dropped off three of the ponies and their guns minus shells four-five miles along, the stranger remarked that the Kid was a very honest hombre.

"I'm not the lobo they think I am," Solo said.

"We never are, are we?" said the other.

They took a cross trail to the west, shoulders huddled against the rain. But that rain made it impossible for them to be trailed. When they passed a lone butte stark in the night, the stranger said he

knew where they were. About midway between Tollan Junction and Durango.

"Through the pass a ways, there's a settlement at a cross-roads. Just some breeds and a Mex or two. For a few dollars, they'll put you up and no questions asked—or answered."

A couple of hours later, they made the crossroads. At a cabin down from a two-bit store and barroom a cross-eyed breed came to the door, stared woodenly, nodded after the stranger talked. He took them out to a shed in the rear and they bedded down on some moldy hay in a corner.

"Wisht I could remember who in tarnation I am," the stranger said. But he was soon snoring.

The Kid lay a while thinking. Through a sheer freak of Fate he had failed to get Butcher captured back at the Tollan depot. Now he was no nearer solution of the kidnapping of the girl than when he had first drawn chips. It hadn't been as easy as he had figured when he learned the girl wasn't kept at the outlaw camp. He didn't know what his next move was to be except that he had to return to Butcher's bunch as if he had finally escaped from Tollan Junction. None of them had gotten a clear glimpse of him in the shooting melee. Of course, if Red had somehow got away and returned, things would be an animal of a far different hue.

But he had to take that chance, Solo decided. He dozed off, a hand hooked over the Colt at his side, now freshly reloaded from the shell belts of those possemen. . . .

When he woke, the sun was full up. He rose and went down to the breed's place, stiff and sore and almost ready to be captured for the sake of a cup of hot java. The breed pointed down to the corner store when asked about grub.

Down in the dingy place with a two-bit bar at one side, a smiling little Mex said he could rustle up some chuck. There were a couple of soiled glasses on the bar but nobody else around. The Kid slumped in a chair. And the silver skull slipped from his pocket to the floor. He recovered it and fingered it around idly on the table.

He heard the crunch of a man's boot outside, half turned. An hombre leading a horse was staring in at him through a side window. Rather at the gristly grinning skull on the table. Then the man's head jerked from view. Solo blinked. He realized it had been the shy-eyed sheepish-faced Legs, John Bird, the man who toted around crippled Judge Hondo Race.

Solo wasted but a split second. Then he realized Bird had yanked himself from sight like a man who didn't want to be seen. The Kid was up and cat-footing it to the door. Gun gliding into his hand, he shoved out a shoulder for a look-see.

He under-rated his foe. He stepped out another pace. Bird leaped out from the corner of the building. He wore that slightly foolish grin and his hands were no place near his tied-down gun scabbard. "Good morning," he said dully. And he reached up as if to scratch his head.

There was a flash of quivering steel. And then the sleeve of the Kid's shooting arm was pinioned to the doorjamb of the place, locked there by a deep-driven knife blade. Bird had drawn from a sheathe slung at the back of his neck. The Kid twisted and dived his stiff right arm for his other gun.

It was a matter of split seconds. Bird half bent and another shimmering blade flowed into his hand from a coat sleeve, bridged space in a silent but deadly streak. The Kid's second gun went into business. Bird was already flung about, swinging back around the corner of the place. In passing, his left hand caught the building wall to steady himself. That was Solo's only target. His gun coughed. Just before that hand vanished, a red bullet-sown track was ripped up the back of it. The Kid's gun sign.

SOLO tugged and ripped his left arm free. He dashed around the building. Bird seemed to have been swallowed in thin air. Solo moved along the side wall and then came to the window opening. He poked in his head just in time to see Bird's booted legs disappearing up the staircase behind the bar of the place. And the hoofs of ponies pounded around a curve down the trail.

The Kid ran back to the front. Three horsemen came hard. At the head of them was the beetling-browed Leader of the Butcher bunch. And it was plain they had just left as John Bird bellowed to them from an upstairs window:

"Leader! It's that Strant hairpin who shot it out with you at the Mustang! The Silver Kid!"

The Kid hated to sidestep trouble. But

he was playing for bigger stakes. It was plain Bird was working with the lobos who had kidnapped the girl. Bird had probably told them how and when the thing could be done. But Bird didn't seem like the key to the girl's whereabouts. Solo was already dashing back to the shed, dodging between dobie hovels.

He got to the shed, wondering if he might be cornered and have to gun it out. Once Leader and his men sighted him fully in the strong sunshine he would never have a chance of passing himself off to Butcher as Pard Fisher again.

But the little stranger who didn't know who he was stood in front with both of their saddled ponies ready. Neither was the Kid's paint horse with the bruised forelegs. But there was no time to wait to get Sorghum now. He hit the leather on the run and they bolted their animals up toward the long timbered slope ahead.

"Heard the gunning an' figured we'd better pull stakes pronto," the stranger called.

They made it into the cover of the timber, struck onto a curving cowpath. They rode at top speed for a few miles, then reined down. Dropping off, the Kid put his ear to the ground. There was not the slightest sound of pursuit. He grinned bleakly. Evidently those Butcher hands had had enough of a taste of Strant's gun-lingo that night back in Durango. They didn't want to chase him with only three-fours of themselves.

"For a hairpin what claims he ain't no owlhoot gent, you sure can dig up a passel of trouble. Possemen again?" the stranger said.

Solo looked up at him. It was the first time he had seen his features in any real light whatsoever. But there was no mistaking the man; Solo's memory for faces was too good. It was the face he had seen on the reward handbill in Marshal M. Durkee's office in Durango the night he had hatched his scheme. Small, dark and topped by dark hair....the same sharp features. Solo could visualize again the "$5000 Reward—Dead or Alive" legend above the picture.

It was the real Pard Fisher, the man the Kid was impersonating. He recalled now hearing the gents in Tollan yelling about how Fisher had been run out after a shooting brawl there the night before.

THEY were pushing through the rough Wild Horse hills southwest of Durango, the Kid trying to dope things out. He dragged hard on his third quirly in a row. He supposed he should take Fisher in as a wanted man. Yet he had other and more important business first. He was moving toward where the last Butcher camp had been pitched.

"Well, if it ain't Fisher," a man called from behind a big boulder.

The real Pard Fisher had been dozing. He jerked up his head, mumbled vaguely, "Somebody call me?"

It was one of the sentries at the new camp. "You sure are locoed," the Kid said quickly to his companion, then hailed the guard. They went through a screen of brush and into a little hidden valley. The new camp was pitched around a bend in it on a small rivulet. At a glance, Solo could see the losses at Tollan Junction had been heavy. Fully a third of the men were missing. Plenty of the others had bandaged arms or hobbled on patched-up legs.

Big Bat Butcher leaped up from beside a smoldering fire and shaded his eyes to stare. "Holy tarnation's sake—you got outa that bloody hole, Fis—"

The Kid cut in before the lobo boss could finish the name. He said he had been grabbed but had got away in the excitement afterward when he was left unguarded a moment. "Picked up this maverick here, Bat. Poor danged fool who don't know his name."

Butcher gave but a brief glance to the real Fisher. "I guess they got Red though," he said.

A load lifted from the tensed Kid. He dropped to the ground. "Reckon so."

"What in blazes happened?"

The Kid shrugged. The real Fisher had got down too. His eyes buzzing, he made for a redeye jug he had spotted. He lifted it and dumped it against his lips like a man just off a waterless desert.

Solo looked Butcher in the eye. "Boss," and that title flattered the big blustering outlaw chief, "Boss, I know danged well you was double-crossed. Don't ask me how I know yet."

Some of the others bunched around and they talked about the battle and the bad luck they had had. The Kid was trying to figure fast, waiting for some carelessly dropped word, a cue. He knew he was near the key to the whole thing. But to

ride in and expose Leader as a traitor working with the outlaw would not bring about the return of the girl. Butcher himself seemed the only one who knew where she was hidden.

"The Judge got his dinero through," Butcher said moodily.

"Well, mebbe he can pay off that ransom—or a chunk of it and we can pull stakes," one of the men said. "This country is going to be all-fired hot pronto."

Butcher turned and looked over at Leader who had stepped out of a little lean-to. Leader said nothing, merely nodding at the Kid. Bat Butcher said weakly, "I don't know yet—I don't know." He spoke like one who took his orders from a higher up.

Some of the men turned away grumbling. The Tollan affair hadn't set well. Typical owlhoot gentry, they liked to stage a hold-up, make a raid, and then light out to enjoy the profits of their loot. This drawn-out devious game they seemed to be playing was irking them.

"If I was double-crossed," Butcher muttered. He turned and pulled away the jug from the still gurling little Fisher and tilted it to his own face. Solo moved toward a pot of java propped on the coals. He was still forced to play a waiting game....

It was late in the afternoon when the big man who had come on the horse to the outside of the camp the night before the Tollan raid came once again. A guard called the boss. He went down to the elbow of the valley to meet the other who sat his horse impatiently. The Kid eased down that way hoping for a glimpse of the hombre's face. But it was masked with a neckerchief tied around below the eyes now.

SOLO swore softly and found his fingers plucking at his throat where the silver skull usually hung. He hated inaction. He eyed the masked one who sat with his left hand in his coat pocket. "All right," Butcher called and turned back.

The Kid's eyes bulged for just a moment then lidded more sleepily than ever. For as the rider prepared to leave, his hand came out of that pocket an instant. And across the back of the masked one's hand, running out of sight up the wrist, was a track of fresh-crusted red blood, Solo's gun sign. That man, the mysterious hombre behind Butcher, was John Bird.

"Well, what do we do?" a couple of men demanded walking up to the boss.

"Gotta lay low a while more yet," Butcher said. "We got to—well, we gotta plan some."

"Hell!" one said.

The Kid paced back, body tensed with impotent anger. Bird was his man. But he could not have struck then without being burned down in a swarm of lead. It was hard to let him ride from sight unchallenged though. He watched Butcher slouch down and go to the jug again. Little Fisher, the real Pard Fisher, lay in drunken slumber over under a tree.

Then Solo got a long-shot hunch. He dropped down across from Butcher and asked for the jug. "Hear down in Durango that you're a-getting your ransom dinero danged soon," he mentioned off handedly.

"You heard—what-t? You dares to go into that town after they had put you in jail once and—"

Solo shrugged as he put down the jug. "Shucks, that marshal, Durkee, he died of heart failure. So I was all right."

Butcher studied him. Then the doubt left his eyes. If this Fisher knew the marshal was dead, it seemed pretty plain he must have been down there on his way back. "You heard what kind of a windy?" he asked.

Solo said, "Fella seemed to know what he was talking about. It was this John Bird what lugs that crippled judge around. I reckon the judge must've got a real chunk of dinero in that stuff that come through at the Junction."

Butcher's eyes were distended. He swallowed noisily. "You heard this Bird say that?"

"Sure it was him. He was buying drinks for the bar and telling all and sundry how he planned to take the dinero himself to meet you that very evening."

Butcher sat frozen. Then he jumped up cursing. "The dirty double-crossing coyote! He can't do this to me! He—" He turned and ran over to the lean-to where Leader was patching a boot. They talked quickly. Then their words grew hotter.

The lieutenant said, "I wouldn't do it, Bat! He said for us to stay clear of there—particular you! It ain't wise. He's got a temper like a snake too. You know him with a knife and—"

Butcher was white. But rage overcame

his fear. "I can go take a look-see. If nothing's wrong at the old Baron place—" He whirled, pointed out Olmsted and another man, told them to saddle up.

The Kid moved casually toward where the pony he had borrowed from the Tollan posse was tethered, threw on the hull. He walked it out with the other ponies. Butcher jumped into the saddle.

"No—no, you ain't coming," he said in a voice hoarse with tension.

"Well, I thought it looked like something was wrong and I'm prodding for trouble after that mess at Tollan," Solo said softly.

The outlaw boss shook his heavy head, called impatiently to Olmsted to hustle, then moved off out of the valley. Olmsted was late, tagging yards behind the boss and his other gunhand. So it was simple for the Kid to hit the hull and drift out still further in the rear as if he were included in the party. The sentries outside didn't challenge him. He threw the spurs to the gray mare he forked and turned to where he could hear Butcher and the pair crashing at a gallop up another slope.

As he rode, praying they would not realize they were being trailed in Butcher's eagerness, Solo put things together. It was apparently Bird who had kidnapped the girl and who was working through Butcher as an intermediary. Butcher was merely John Bird's tool. The latter had the girl secreted at the deserted Baron place. And now, Butcher, thanks to Solo's story, was headed there, afraid of being double-crossed.

They got out of the broken hill country. Butcher cut down to the main trail in the Durango valley south of the town and pounded down it. Solo had to keep to the edge of the timbered valley side lest he be spotted. It was much tougher riding. But he managed to keep them in sight until almost the end. They swung into an offshoot of the broad valley and were gone.

GAMBLING recklessly with the showdown close, the Kid raced across the open and got into the side draw, topped a rise. He saw the old Baron place, a rundown outfit with saddle-backed barns, one half burned, a windmill leaning crazily, ranchyard fences sagging like old spider webbing around a broken-down main house of two stories. Ahead, Butcher had spurred into the lead on his powerful steeldust and was even then hopping off by the broken end of the porch. His two gunhands trailed behind.

With the sun already gone from sight in the draw and a damp twilight gathering, the Kid hesitated no longer and pushed the mare for all she was worth. He saw the men pull up and go in. By the yard gate, the Kid hit the dirt running and toiled up a slope through the rank grass.

It was quiet inside. He couldn't wait. He ran around to a side door that hung drunkenly over fallen-in steps and tugged at the knob. It grunted open. He was in a smaller hall, catfooted it down it. The voices came from a room at the far side of the house. He moved toward them, guns gliding free of their scabbards. Olmsted stood in the doorway of the room.

Beyond him, Solo made out Butcher in the dimness. The outlaw was leaning over an old metal bed. And sitting on it, handcuffed to the frame, was a slim red-headed girl. She stared up at him defiantly.

The Kid made his play. No sense waiting longer. "Elevate 'em—or git salivated!" he called softly as he glided in.

Olmsted's hands jerked up. But Butcher, sighting the Kid and knowing he really had been double-crossed now, made his play. His first shot caught Olmsted in the back, breaking his spine. The Kid doubled and leaped over the falling body, guns crackling. He saw Butcher spin as lead ripped into his shoulder. The Kid's spur caught in a broken floorboard and he half tripped. The other gunhand, striking from behind the door, merely got the Kid's sombrero with his gun barrel. The Kid shook it clear of his eyes and shot him in the side.

"I—I give up!" Butcher cried from where he sat against the wall.

The Kid blew at his smoking gun tips, looked at the girl. "You're all right, miss. Now—"

The soft hissing knife blade sliced by the Kid's eye. But it gashed open his forehead. The blood gushed into his eyes, blinding him. He had a glimpse of John Bird, who had been upstairs, coming down the hall.

And another knife blade, plucked from Bird's boot, locked the Kid's left arm to the panel of the open door. Butcher pushed himself up and drew from his shoulder stache. "Drop them weapons!" he barked, tough once again.

The Kid let the one fall from his free hand, slowly released the other. It slid

down his leg and caught in the edge of his boot. Nobody noticed in the dimness. Bird stormed in, roaring.

"I warned you never to come here, Bat! I warned you if you tried to touch the girl—"

"He said you was double-crossing me!" Butcher almost whined. "Put the other knife away, Legs! Fisher there said—"

"Call me that and I'll—" Bird raged.

THE Kid, apparently sagging against the door, had worked that second knife to let him loose. He jerked. Cloth ripped and he was loose and running down the hall. But he couldn't see to fire. He fumbled around a turning, groped blindly, found the front door and got it open. The cool air hit his face as he sleeved it with his right arm desperately. The knife had pierced the flesh of his left arm that time. It was worthless.

Then he was falling off the edge of the porch he couldn't see. He lay in the deep grass, praying, knuckling his eyes. He heard them whispering inside. A pony whinnied. Then men were running up from the trail in the long grass.

"Who's that?" Butcher bellowed from inside the door.

"It's me—Pard Fisher," the real Fisher cried. Back at the camp he had heard Leader mentioned Fisher's, the Kid's absence. And it had been clue to his own name. After he talked, he and Leader had hit the trail for the Baron place.

And Fisher was a doomed man. His answer was the blurt of Bat Butcher's gun. Twice. Fisher dropped, shot through the throat. "You danged fool!" Leader bawled from down in the grass. "This is the real Fisher!"

"That other was the Kid—Strant!" John Bird spat. "And we got to find him or—"

Solo Strant, eyes cleared, rose from the grass at the end of the porch like a ghost in the rising moon, a bloody-headed ghost. And his gun slammed its death chant. Bird fired once and went down, big body shaking the old building. His gun-scarred hand moved feebly once toward the side of his head. Half of it was gone.

The Kid leaped back onto the edge of the porch. The craven Butcher ducked back inside. Solo whirled as Leader's gun stung the dropping night with its muzzle spurt. The Kid answered with two leaden replies. Leader's eyes seemed to bulge from under their beetling brows. He half twisted. And then he sank slowly, the crimson leaking from a hole over one lung.

The gun reports died. From inside the house came Bat Butcher's pleading whine. "Lemme come out, Strant! I'm whupped! I'll throw out my hoglegs!"

For answer, they shattered through a pane of an upstairs window. And the huge bullying outlaw's boots thumped on the stairs. After all, maybe he could hang everything on the other two.

Solo sleeved at that gashed forehead again. In a moment he would go in and get Lily Race and take her back to her crippled father. But his weary smile was at the thought of getting back and picking up his injured horse.

It's Trail's End for You, Jabe Towner!

You thought you were downright smart givin' me a bad name, spreadin' yore lies about my gusto for killin', dubbin' me the Hell-For-Certain Kid.

And now it's all backfirin' in yore weaseley face, Towner.

Because I'm usin' that rep for all it's worth, and neither you nor yore bottlickin' sheriff can keep me from cleanin' yore polecta outfit plumb out of this country. I've got a new name, now; it's

"The Sure-Fire Kid"

Don't miss this action-packed book-length novel by

CLIFF CAMPBELL

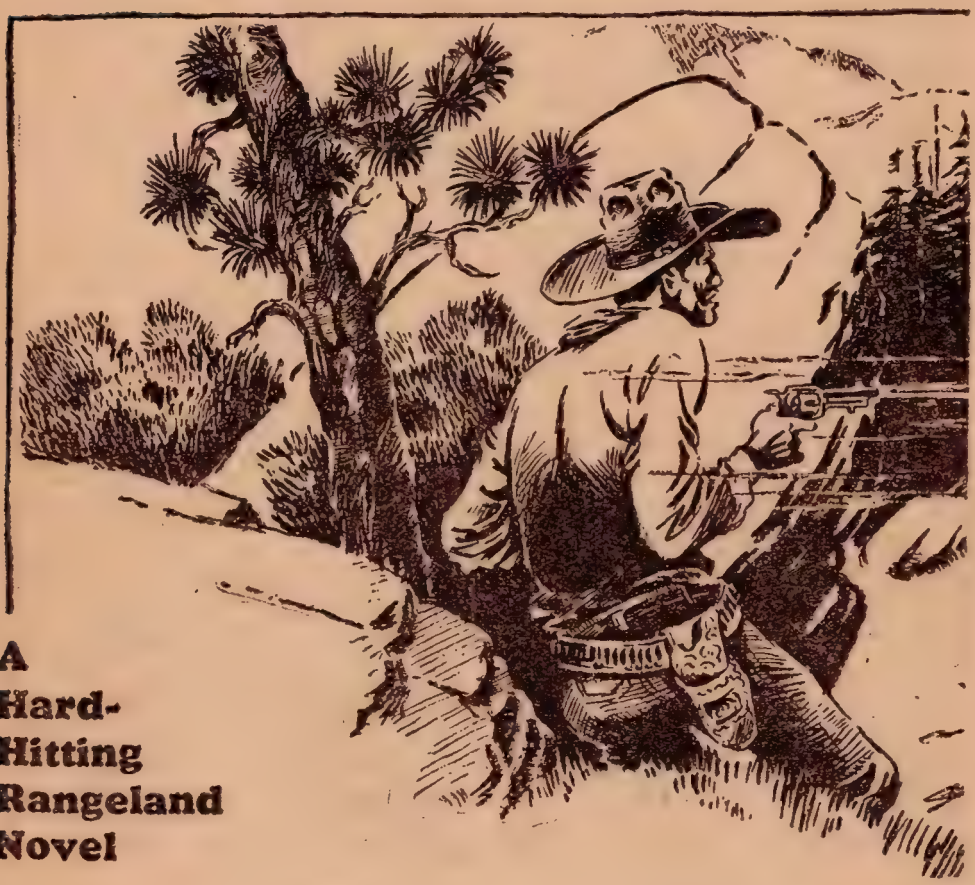
It's in the October issue of

WESTERN ACTION

15c ON ALL STANDS

• SATAN'S GUN-SON •

By Ed Earl Repp



A Hard-Hitting Rangeland Novel

Bronc Howden had to fight not only the shadows of his own past, but that of his father's as well. And Link Carter, foreman of the Merrett ranch, had the finger on Bronc as the engineer behind the rustling outfit that was making Merrett's cattle disappear. But when Bronc found that his worst fears were true and that his father was in this game . . .

CHAPTER I

Longloop Curse

IN ALL HIS life there had been but few times when young Bronc Howden had been able to laugh. Reared under the shadow of discontent and fear, he had never known the joys of youthful exuberance. The few times he had tasted the heady wine of freedom were so far between that he had forgotten what it was like.

But this morning, when the sun was warm on the Box M range and the magpies were jabbering gayly in the feedlots, something loosened that infernal tightness

within him. To his own surprise he found himself suddenly whistling—a thing he hadn't done in as long as he could remember.

His fine lips felt dry and the sound that came from them was shrill and unmusical, but as he saddled his pony there in the corral he had no mind for that. All he knew was that something had let loose within him, like a steel spring suddenly let go. For a moment he was afraid that even that would come to an abrupt end. It felt so good to be like this. The bitterness that gnawed constantly at his soul was gone now. He could hold no grudges when his whole being felt in tune with the world.

With mounting spirits he cinched his saddle and made sure that everything was tight and range-shape. Still whistling softly he led his mount across the ranch yard, but before he had taken a dozen steps, his gayety dropped from him like a cloak. His tall, angular body stood frozen in his tracks, his pale eyes, suddenly bleak, swinging to the open door of the bunkhouse just beyond.

He didn't need to listen hard to recognize the voices issuing from the door. But what Link Carter, cadaverous ramrod of the Box M, was saying to Hurd Merrett instantly put the bitterness back in his heart and tightened once more the steel spring that was his insides.

"Like I promised you, boss," Link's rasping voice cut into Bronc's nerves like a file. "They took two hundred head last night—right off the South range. Just like before, they disappeared into nowhere without leavin' a single trace."

The Box M owner's voice bore a deep note of weariness as he answered.

"If it keeps on I'll go busted," Merrett said tersely. "I can't understand it. We've hidden our market stuff where only a few of us knew about, but they pick 'em off no matter where we put them."

Bronc could picture big Hurd Merrett's discouragement. He had always liked him, a square man and a fine boss. As for Carter, from the day the Box M boss had taken him on, no love had been lost between them.

"It ain't hard to understand if you try to, Hurd," Link gave back. "I been preachin' it to you for months now — that them longloopers have got a spotter on your payroll. I—"

"Never mind," rapped Merrett bluntly. "I know what you're thinking. If the rustlin' is being engineered from here, it simply ain't young Howden doin' it."

"They are your cows, Merrett," Carter rasped, and both came to the door. Bronc busied himself with his cinch and out of the tails of his eyes saw a smile of scorn touch Link's thin lips as he watched the cattleman walk dejectedly toward the house. Then he felt the ramrod's black, ferret-like eyes upon him.

Bronc's whole insides blazed with anger at the foreman's innuendoes. He suddenly remembered other times when Carter had gone out of his way to condemn and belittle him. His background was again rising to devil him. Bitterly, he wondered if it was worthwhile trying to live down the fact that he was Bronc Howden, son of Shag Howden, renegade, rustler and border-hopper, bait for bounty hunters from Laramie to Laredo.

Would he ever be allowed to forget the unsavory heritage fate had dealt him? But it wasn't only Carter who refused to grant him that privilege. Most of the other folks

As their leader fell the other renegades sought cover behind rocks.

of Whetstone Basin bore him the same distrust. He had heard them say behind his back that you can't tame a wolf's whelp or make a house cat out of a lynx cub.

There were some who didn't agree. Among them were Hurd Merrett and his daughter, Laura. Bronc had never understood why, unless they were more considerate than most, unwilling to condemn a man until his guilt was proven.

His brain a vortex of conflicting emotions, he fought hard to control his desire to whirl and smash a fist into Carter's smirking face. His hands trembled as he took up his reins and prepared to mount. Then he found Carter right behind him.

"You couldn't have been accidentally eavescroppin', could you, Howden?" the ramrod clipped accusingly. "It wouldn't be a healthy sign for you if you were."

Bronc dropped his left foot from the stirrup and turned. The wintry bleakness of his eyes matched the coldness of his voice when he said:; "Carter, I've tried my best to keep out of trouble with you, but I don't mind sayin'—any more intimations like you made in there is goin' to cause plenty. I'm Bronc Howden, Old Shag's boy. I can't help that any more than I can help not liking the way you comb your hair. But until you've got some evidence that I'm double-crossin' Merrett, you keep your trap shut."

Carter's high cheek bones reddened. His calloused thumbs hooked into his levis belt. "I suppose you didn't know they got our market stuff again last night, did you?" he smirked.

"I heard you tellin' the boss," clipped Bronc. "Don't make any more cracks about me."

"Maybe you knowed all about it even before I told him," persisted Carter evilly. "I reckon you know a hell of a lot more than that, Howden."

Bronc's fists balled into clots of muscle and bone. "Carter," he bit out, "you're a liar! I'm on the level and you know it!"

Carter laughed derisively. "That's what they all say," he scourged. "You're as crooked as the Whetstone skyline. You might fool the boss, but not me. Any son of Shag Howden couldn't be anything but a rustler!"

A surge of bitterness flooded Bronc. The color drained from his face as with a quick flip of his hand he unbuckled his gunbelt and let the weapon fall to the ground. He tossed his Barlow knife beside it and kicked both away, battle lights gleaming in his eyes.

"That'll be skin off your nose, Link!" he said flatly. "Shuck your guns and put up your dew claws. No man ever called me a rustler to my face without havin' to fight!"

Link Carter scrubbed the back of a hairy hand across his smirking mouth. His voice was like chilled steel as he backed off and let his weapons fall. "Hell on a fence rail, ain't you?" he sneered. "I'll fix that, cow-thief!"

SLOWLY he came forward, his long, rangy body hunched in a slight crouch. Bronc had a vision of a coiled rattler ready to strike. He knew Carter was no coward, knew that beneath his faded range garb was a supple, slab-muscled body that years of saddlewhacking had tempered to the toughness of whangleather and steel. The thinness of his frame and the palor of his cheeks had deceived many belligerent waddy into taking a punch at him, only to learn that Carter's long arms and knobby fists carried the power of driving pistons.

But Bronc was ready and confident. Here was an outlet for the pent-up emotion that had deviled him so long. Something like pure eagerness crept into his face as he awaited the ramrod's attack. Lean legs planted wide apart and firm on the hard-packed ground, he stood straight and stalwart. His heart that but a moment before had been light for the first time in months was now filled with a fresh bitterness that only Carter's blood could sate. The clean, boyish face that had been puckered in a gay whistle, was now grim and determined.

He had hoped that by hard, conscientious and honest work he could live down the heritage that dogged him. Link Carter was denying him that chance and the clash he had long hoped to avoid, trouble that would be likely to do his case more harm than good, was now inescapable.

This was it—root hog or die. A low growl came to his lips as he parried Carter's first blows on his forearms. "Do your do, Link," he murmured, "and be damned to you."

Then he was suddenly a grim fighting machine that could know no hurt, who was ready to give all he had for the right to live without fear of what the world thought of him as the son of a renegade.

Quick to sense the beginning of a struggle, punchers came hurrying from the feed

sheds, blacksmith shop and barn. But Bronc was oblivious to the ring of excited faces that formed around him and his antagonist. With the speed of a lightning bolt his fist lashed out. Carter tried to roll with the punch, but he wasn't quick enough.

Bronc landed a stinging blow to the ramrod's beak-like nose. Carter staggered back against the waddy's horse. A guttural curse crowded from the foreman's throat. His hairy fists pulled back, his head drew down on his flaring shoulders. Like a cougar at bay, he leaped forward.

Like tall trees bending in a storm, they came together, fists flailing. Bronc pumped solid blows to the murderous, reddened face in front of him and felt joy as his arms tingled under the shock of his punches. His own body absorbed the piston-like hammerings of the ramrod, and his muscles corded against numbing torrent of blows thrown at him.

The clamor of the excited punchers was lost to him. He was alone—fighting for his life—for his right to the respect that had been denied him.

In a moment both men were cut and bleeding. Carter's nose was running red now and where his right knuckles caught Bronc a glancing blow on the side of the head, blood dribbled from a ripped earlobe down his throat. In the center of the circle of riders they fought like two infuriated cougars, slashing, straining, smashing with bloody fists.

With terrific effort Bronc slugged the foreman off his feet, and the impetus of his swing carried him down atop him. They threshed mightily on the ground for a moment, kicking, scrambling and cursing. Then as they got to their feet they surged to battle again amid the words of advice from the amused onlookers. They stood toe-to-toe and slugged. A thin stream of blood trickled from Bronc's mouth suddenly, but the waddy was unconscious of it. He was absorbed only in one thing—to make Link Carter eat his own insults.

The predatory face of the Box M foreman was an ugly mask of blood and dirt. Bronc's slashing knuckles had cut his lips and made a red smear of his nose. That member had lost all semblance of shape now and each time the waddy's fists touched it, Carter emitted a deep grunt of agony. Curses of rage gushed from his throat and his torso heaved and writhed as he drove ruthlessly at the puncher. Bronc could see he was tiring rapidly, but there was a stout heart incased in that rangy chest. He tried hard for a knockout and each time Carter shrewdly covered his spade-like chin.

Feinting suddenly he lured the other's guard down and quick as a diving bullbat, his right flicked out and up. Carter took it squarely on the point of the chin. His head flew back and jolted between his shoulder blades. He stumbled backward into the arms of a puncher who pushed him forward, shaking his head desperately to clear it of the cobwebs that clouded his eyes and brain.

Quick to follow up his advantage, Bronc charged in for the kill. Carter backpedaled, gulping air frenziedly. So intent were they upon their fight, the punchers upon the drama, none noticed the buckboard rolling forward at a fast clip from the ranch gates.

A GIRL held the reins of the running blacks in the traces. Her curved lips were drawn tight, amber eyes filled with repugnance of what she saw was taking place within the human circle there behind the Box M bunkhouse.

She tooled the vehicle with the effortless grace of long practice and her supple body swayed easily with the lurching of the seat. Her corn-colored hair, whipping in the wind, streamed out behind her shapely head. In a pluming cloud of dust she curbed the horses and leaped from the seat before the buckboard came to a full stop. She rushed forward, her riding skirt flapping sharply. The punchers saw her and fell away.

"It's Miss Merrett," murmured one. "And is she ruffled over this ruckus!"

As Barbara burst into the middle of the ring her hands flew to her throat at what she saw. It wasn't nice to see. Two battered, bleeding hulks, pawing now with exhaustion, neither willing to give ground or ask quarter, spent their remaining strength in effort to land a finishing blow.

Now Bronc was summoning all his muscles to swing furiously. His fist caught Carter on the throat and sent him sprawling to his knees. He leaped up almost immediately, but as he came his Barlow was out and he was stripping the blade. Barbara Merrett seemed frozen, her voice lost, as he stalked his prey, his blade ready. Then she screamed.

"Link! Stop!" she cried, running forward to plant herself between the two men, her hands grasping the kill-eager foreman. He looked past her at Bronc and started to push on, but she held her ground in front of

him. "Give me that Barlow, Carter!" she demanded, her voice throaty with authority.

"It'll be a pleasure," he rasped, "after I sink it in that dirty cow-thief's brisket!"

He saw Bronc bend over suddenly and scoop up his own weapons. His face took on a look of fear when the waddy flipped up his gun-muzzle. "Give it to her before I do a little killin' on my own account, Link!" Bronc rapped. "I reckon hell wouldn't be lonesome if you was there!"

"That will do, Bronc!" Barbara flung at him as Carter, ignoring her demand, snapped his Barlow shut and pocketed it. "If dad knew about this, he'd fire you both!"

"Might be a good thing for him if he did," Carter sneered. "He'd at least get rid of the longlooper that's spottin' our herds for Kingfisher Karp, Shag Howden an' the rest of the gang!"

Battle lights again flecked Bronc's eyes. "We'll go into that later," he promised, and turned to Barbara. "I'll be seein' your dad now, Miss Barbara," he added, and disappeared around the bunkhouse toward the house beyond.

She spun to Carter. "If you'd spend a little more time trying to cut the trail of those rustlers and less hanging around the bunkhouse picking fights, maybe we wouldn't lose our herds!" her eyes blazed. "We've told you before of our faith in Bronc. You and all the rest are driving him to crime for his own protection. You let him alone—all of you—and get busy, or the Box M will be signing on a whole new crew of hands!"

The punchers hurried away. Carter sent a lingering, smirking look Bronc's way, then followed them. The sternness went out of Barbara's face and was replaced by a mixed expression of longing and dissatisfaction as she turned toward the ranch house.

CHAPTER II

Longloop Trail

ON THE way to the house, Bronc had paused long enough at the trough to whoosh cold water over his battered face. His body was one mass of aches and the taste of his treatment by Whetstone Basin was like bitter gall to his mouth. Now as he faced Hurd Merrett in the front room, he knew but one determination.

But he was startled by the look of worry on the cowman's seamed, kindly face. Facing ruin by the steady loss of his herds to a gang believed to be harboring Shag Howden, he had spent many sleepless nights of late. And Bronc's coming disturbed a troublous nap. He could see that, for Merrett's pale eyes were puffy, his iron gray hair tousled.

A look of surprise claimed his face when he saw the bruises and cuts Bronc bore. But before he could speak, the puncher broke out quickly: "I reckon you can see I had a fight, Mr. Merrett. Carter got ringy. You've been nice to me personally and if you're hard-pressed, I won't ask for my wages. But I'm leavin'."

The old cowman grunted his alarm. "Leavin'?" he breathed. "What the hell for, son? For a plugged peso I'd fire that walkin' bed-slat for violatin' my order. I never did like him anyhow, an' to prove it an' my trust in you, I'd give you his job."

"That wouldn't improve things," murmured Bronc morosely. "They'd still say that a Howden could never be anything bug a longlooper. No, I'd best be on my way. Maybe someday things'll be a lot different and I'll come back. But now—"

Barbara's entry into the room interrupted him. Vitality and strength glowed in her smooth cheeks. Her amber eyes regarded him earnestly and he found her gaze disconcerting.

"So you've decided to pull out, have you, Bronc?" she said tersely. "Because you can't stand gossip or because if they think you're a renegade you might as well be one?"

Bronc regarded her sharply. That was a strong accusation for a girl to make. Anger ignited within him.

"I'm not runnin' out on gossip," he said. "A man's yellow to cheap out on anything. All I ask for is a chance to prove I'm not what folks say."

"We're givin' it to you, Bronc," said Merrett.

"That's just it," said Bronc. "You been givin' it to me ever since I came here six months ago and I'm beholding to you for it. But your herds are still being rustled. If I left, they couldn't say I'm spottin' for the gang. It's best for all of us that I do a little travelin'."

Merrett shrugged. He saw there was no use trying to argue him out of his determination. He put out his hand and Bronc took it, an aching lump rising suddenly to his throat. "If that's the way you feel, son,"

the cowman said, "I reckon it'll have to be. Good luck to you?"

Bronc nodded. "Where are you going?" Barbara's voice quivered a little now. Her eyes seemed suddenly misty with a tenderness that he had never seen before. It served to temper his grimness. The slow warmth he always felt when near her stole over him again. It seemed to him that he had always loved this girl, but would he ever have the courage to tell her, or the right to hope she might feel the same way toward him until he could offer her an unblemished name?

"I don't know, ma'am," he said simply, and his voice was choked with emotion. "But wherever I go, I'll always remember how good you and your dad treated me."

Moodily he stepped to the door and was gone. Merrett gave a deep sigh and knew by the flood of tears that welled in Barbara's eyes that he would not be the only one on the Box M to miss Bronc Howden. She turned and fled upstairs to her room.

Bronc gigged northward and as he made his way along the rugged edges of the Whetstone Basin he was tormented by the sombre thoughts that went with him. More than ever before he realized now that he had never been a part of the society of the basin. By virtue of his parentage they regarded him as an outcast and treated him accordingly. He recalled vividly the numerous battles he had gone through to defend himself against the jeers and insults of the Whetstone people.

And now since it was known that Kingfisher Karp and his gang of renegades were operating in the country, it was openly charged that he, Bronc, was in league with them. Bronc knew Shag Howden would be riding with them. They had been together for years and no more cunning longloopers had ever teamed up to strip a range clean.

Hurd Merrett's cattle, he knew, were the cream of the Whetstone. His herds had been disappearing in droves and not a single clue could be found as to where they were being taken. Other Whetstone ranches were likewise being gutted, but only the stout defense of Merrett had kept Bronc from a cottonwood dance.

HUNGRY and broke he had been turned away from every chuckwagon in the Whetstone before Merrett took him on. A good judge of cattle and men, the Box M owner had seen something in the youngster the others had not. Bronc realized he owed him a lot. Except for Carter's prodding and insults, his stay there gave him the happiest days of his life.

It was all gone now. He shuddered at the life he had led prior to that—the cold receptions at the supper fires, the usual orders that followed—"No room for a Howden here. Move on!"

Those and many other thoughts rode with him through the day until late afternoon when he found himself along the upper reaches of Tensleep Creek. There he stopped to rest and water his mount and look for sign.

Somewhere in this region of the Seven Devils Hills he felt would be Karp's hideout. He remembered his father saying that you could lose your own shadow in the Seven Devils north of the Whetstone. It was the only real place of concealment within the radius of a hundred miles. The many little wooded canyons, draws and deep washes afforded refuge for wanted men, sanctuary for society's outcasts and for the herds of stolen cattle that could be held for safe passage under the cover of night to the border beyond the Hills.

Somewhere here he was sure he would find Kingfisher Karp and Shag Howden. It might take him days or weeks, but with a surge of bitterness he felt confident that he would at least be fed at their chuck fire. The worst he could hope for was a quick and unmarked grave. Even that, he reasoned morosely, would be better than the living death of a social exile.

After a short rest he swung back into his saddle and rode on. The sun had dropped down behind the Hills and their long shadows punched eastward across the lowlands. He followed the bosque of the creek through patches of willow and cottonwood and finally reached the fringe of pinon pines bordering the denser timber beyond.

A clearing loomed abruptly before him and he drew rein warily to survey the tiny cabin half hidden in the shadow pools at the far end. Whether this was one of the Howden hideouts, he didn't know. There was no sign of life about the place. His alert eyes never left it as he guided his pony around through the trees to the other side and quietly pulled up behind the shack.

Thinking it would be a good place to

spend the night, he was about to light down when a harsh voice halted him.

"You've come far enough, mister!" a man cracked out from the shadows off to one side. "Stay put!"

Instantly Bronc's head jerked sideways. Then he saw the black silhouette of a short, stubby man standing beside a pinon. The rifle he held looked almost as tall as he was, but its muzzle was unwavering with the sights lined on Bronc's brisket.

"Don't get your hackles up," Bronc breathed. "I just stumbled on this place."

"Maybe you did and maybe you didn't," the other gave back gruffly. "State your business and move on!"

Stiff-leggedly the oldster came forward, stock of his gun resting on his right hip. As he came up Bronc could make out a full, iron-gray beard matting his face. Encasing his bowed legs was a pair of fringed buckskin britches. Plain moccasins gave him the silent tread of a panther. The width of his shoulders spoke of tremendous power. His bare, leonine head sat on a thick neck and his graying hair hung, mountain-man style, down to his shoulders.

"Folks ain't in the habit of callin' on Old Taos Jones by accident," he said flatly. "I reckon you figured to catch me by surprise, too, eh?"

Bronc regarded him levelly from his saddle, understanding building up within him. He knew now who this oldster was.

Old Taos Jones was a legendary figure up here in the Seven Devils. Some said he was just an eccentric old hermit, but Bronc remembered Shag Howden telling that Jones had freighted over the Santa Fe Trail in his younger days and when the railroad came, took up prospecting, being among the first to strike it rich up Cripple Creek way. According to Shag, Jones had taken his rich horde of gold and disappeared into the Seven Devils where he lived the lonely life of a recluse with his wealth hidden near him. Shag and Karp had promised to get that wealth sooner or later and the idea came to Bronc that this was one of the reasons for their presence in the country now.

A grimness claimed his face. Taos Jones might be a good man to ride the river with for a while. There was a chance the lure of his supposed riches might bring the renegades to him. He relaxed and eyed the oldster affably.

"Reckon I understand your skittishness, Taos," he said. "I've heard your story many times, but I ain't interested. I ain't looking for anybody's gold. All I want to do is meet up with two people—Kingfisher Karp and Shag Howden!"

There was a ring of sincerity in Bronc's voice that the ancient patriarch of the Seven Devils did not miss. A wicked gleam sprang into his eyes. Bronc felt them probing him, biting deep into his very soul.

"You've said enough, youngster," the grizzled veteran said, and his rifle came down. "Light down and make yourself to home for the night. Any gent that's gunnin' for them two is welcome at my shack any time."

IT WAS a paradoxical comradeship that evolved from that twilight encounter—that of a youngster exiled from society because of a tainted name, and that of an oldster made an outcast by his own suspicion of his neighbors. Whether he had a horde of gold or not, Bronc didn't know. Nor did he venture to ask. He stayed on at the shack and each day at dawn he rode away to search through the Seven Devils for sign of the renegade hideout, returning when dusk fell. He combed the deep gullies, blind canyons and lofty peaks relentlessly, but found no sign. Discouragement claimed him more than once.

Each morning Old Taos watched him ride away with fresh determination. He asked no questions. In their conversations at night he never talked of himself or his alleged gold horde. Bronc failed even to hint that such a cache might exist. They let it go at that, each lonely for the other's company.

Bronc continued his search which became more and more a hopeless task. He cut no sign that might indicate the presence of the gang and he was beginning to convince himself that the renegades had pulled out to other fields. He began to feel a great longing to be back on the Box M, for the quiet evenings with Barbara Merrett. But he knew that as long as the raiders continued stripping the Whetstones, he would have to remain in exile.

Following an exceptionally hard day in the saddle he returned wearily to the little shack of Taos Jones. Darkness had fallen and for the first time since meeting the oldster, no light shown in the cabin window

to greet his nightly return. A deep premonition gripped him and almost fearfully he went quietly to the door and looked inside.

His call to the oldster sounded hollow in the silence. "Taos! You all right?"

There was no reply. Reseating his guns in their pouches, he went inside cautiously. For a long moment he stood just within the door, his eyes probing the Stygian blackness. His ears ached as he strained for some slight sound that might indicate danger. Hearing and seeing nothing he thumbed a match into flame in cupped hands to cast the yellow glow over the room. The place was empty. Quickly he went to the table and lit the lamp.

The shack was just as he had left it that morning. Taos Jones was gone. He wondered if the oldster had gone out for fresh meat and had strayed farther than he expected, delaying his return. This thought was discarded when he remembered that Taos seldom strayed beyond hailing distance of the clearing at any time.

As he went outside he wondered if this was what he had hoped for—a clue to the whereabouts of Kingfisher and Shag. They could have come here, grabbed Taos and carted him away to make him tell where his riches, if any, were hidden. Or perhaps they might have killed him, found his cache and departed.

His fears mounting, he halted outside and called again. This time louder. He listened hard and heard only the wind soughing along the tops of the trees bordering the clearing.

Then suddenly he caught another sound, like a low moan. It made the short hairs at the base of his neck crawl. Involuntarily his hands dropped to his guns. It came again and this time he was able to determine its location.

Grimly he hurried toward the trees and started groping his way through the darkness, stumbling over a log and barking his shins. He gave a low oath and went on. Then he saw the huddle form of Taos Jones on the ground ahead. Quickly he ran to him and knelt down, taking his shaggy head in his arm.

"Taos," he murmured gently, yet his voice held a quality of fierceness. "What happened?"

The old patriarch gasped for breath and Bronc knew that only a bullet hole through the lungs could make a man wheeze like that. It was a death rattle.

"They got me this time, lad," he mumbled. "Plumb through the brisket."

"They—?" Bronc bit out. "Who, Taos?"

"I didn't get a good look at 'em," Jones mouthed. "They came for my money. I wouldn't tell 'em and they gunned me—"

Bronc saw he was going fast. Blood dribbled from his ashen lips now, staining through the mat of beard cloaking his face.

"What did they look like?" the waddy's voice was bleak. "Was it—Shag Howden?"

"Might've been," Taos burbled. His jaw was losing its strength and wanted to sag over. It was death's approach. "Big hombre—eyes masked. Couldn't see 'em. But he won't get my cache, lad. I'm leavin' it to you. You're—a—good boy—been watchin' you. It's well hid—find a—a—map—loose stone—cabin fire—place."

Bronc could feel his once-strong body growing steadily weaker. His throat ached for him. Here, dying in his arms, was one of the few men he had ever known who had treated him decently. "Shucks, Taos," he murmured. "You'll pull through this. I bet you've freighted your weight in lead many a time an' took a hoedown."

"It's all yours, son," the oldster yanked himself back from the abyss. "But they'll be back to get it—"

His body went slack and Bronc saw only the whites of his eyes staring up at him.

"Yeah," he breathed. "They'll be back. And when they do there'll be a gunsmoke reckonin'!"

AFTER piling the last stone on the shallow grave there beneath the pinions, Bronc stood bareheaded for a moment and then with heavy heart returned to the cabin. The wick in the lamp had burned down and now only a faint glow emanated from it, giving the bare room an eerie aspect.

Keeping well back from the window and door, he sat down heavily on the bunk to think. Here was the scene, he was sure, of another Shag Howden crime. How long, he wondered, would it continue? How long must he continue to suffer in the reflecting light of his sire's misdeeds? He asked himself what he could or would do about it if he ever met his father face to face? Was blood really thicker than water, or could he summon the courage to disprove that theory?

There was determination to test it out

when his eyes lifted unconsciously to the field stone fireplace Old Taos had built at one end of the room. He wondered suddenly if Taos had imagined a cache of Cripple Creek gold. Or were the tales Shag had told true?

With increasing interest he got up and went to the smoke-blackened fireplace. His eyes swept over the face. There were a thousand or more field stones cemented there. If one containing a map was loose, smoke and soot had long ago erased the tell-tale markings. Besides, Karp and his gang might already have found it and replaced it so cunningly as to defy detection.

He went to work carefully tapping each stone with the heel of one of his guns. One by one he went over the stones; found none that sounded loosely enough to be lifted out without chipping the hard cement joint. Finally the last lower row of stones came under his inspection and yielded nothing.

He sat down on a hand-hewn bench in front of the fire pit, wondering if he'd missed a stone. Perhaps, he thought, Old Taos' map was just imagination. He was sure he hadn't overlooked a single rock in that fireplace. Each had sounded solid under the tap of his gun-heel. He glanced around the room. It hadn't been searched by the oldster's murderers. Everything was in order.

His eyes wandered back to the fireplace and up the chimney. As he sat there minutely inspecting the pile his toe touched the edge of a slab of stone in the hearth, lifted a fraction and dropped back into place. Instantly his attention dropped to it. He reached down and dug his fingers into a crack between the hearth and the floor, and lifted. The slab came up and underneath he saw a small cubbyhole in which lay a folded parchment.

His blood pounding, he snatched it up, went to the table and began smoothing it out. The parchment was yellow with age, soiled from the black ash dust that had seeped through the hearth cracks. Then before him lay the secret of Taos Jones. This was what Shag Howden had sworn someday to get, a secret that had brought sudden death to the eccentric old patriarch.

Attentively Bronc glanced over the map and pictured each land mark indelibly in his mind. So engrossed was he that he failed to hear a light tread behind him.

"Paw high, Howden!" rapped a bleak voice from the doorway. "Don't try anything funny or you'll get lead right where your suspenders cross!"

Bronc whirled, his first impulse being to snatch at his guns. He found himself looking into the eyes of Sheriff Tom Bengold of Whetstone Basin. The .45 in the lawman's right hand was cocked and there was determination in the set of his flat lips. Beside him stood Link Carter, ramrod of the Box M, a satisfied smirk on his thin face.

"It ain't often we could sneak up behind you, Howden," the tinstar bit out. "You're goin' soft if you didn't know we was tailin' you. I—"

"Maybe that accounts for a lot of things," Bronc's voice was dripping bitter sarcasm, his bleak eyes on Carter. "You probably saw me buryin' a friend awhile ago."

"Wise acres ought to be plowed under," clipped Carter, hands on his gun heels. "You gave us the slip up yonder. What we want to know is who's under that pile of dirt and rock?"

"Come on, Howden," rapped Bengold. "It couldn't have been Taos Jones, could it?"

"It could and was," gave back Bronc tersely. "I came back and found him murdered!"

Bengold's horned mustaches twitched. "Then it's skin off your nose, Howden," he said accusingly. "You've been here all alone with him. You'll have a hard time talkin' yourself out of a murder charge. What's that you was lookin' at?"

Bronc's face was immobile, but his mind was racing. At last, he thought, Carter and his friends were able to pin something on him. He realized that Bengold was right. He would have a hard time establishing his innocence. The name of Howden wouldn't be a help, either. His insides tightened again as he spoke.

"Take a look if you want," he ground out.

"Fetch it here, Link," the lawman nodded to Carter. "I'll keep him covered so he won't pull any tricks."

Carter walked around him to the table, careful to stay out of Bronc's reach. He picked up the parchment and glanced at it under the yellow lamplight. "It's a map," he said at length, and then whistled softly. "A map showing the location of Old Taos Jones' gold cache, by hell!"

Bengold's face hardened. "And it was in your possession, Howden," he said flatly. "You dry-gulched the old-timer just for that. Pull his stingers, Link, and we'll be headin' home!"

While Carter slipped up behind him and stripped him of his guns, Bronc felt the world crashing down about him completely. Helplessly he allowed Bengold to handcuff him and then in something of a daze he was thrust outside toward his horse by the jubilant Box M ramrod.

CHAPTER III

Nocturnal Raiders

IT WAS midnight when the trio of captors and captive rode down out of the Seven Devils and skirted the northernmost lines of the Box M. During the long ride Bronc had plenty of time to think what would happen to him in Whetstone when they had him in jail and news got around that he'd murdered Old Taos Jones for his gold. He doubted if Bengold would be able to hold back a hangnoose mob. Whetstone Basin was like a box of dynamite with a short fuse attached due to the depredations of the renegades. A Howden in jail would be the match that would explode it.

He knew he couldn't hope for acquittal if he ever reached a court of law. The evidence against him was perfect for a verdict of guilty. He was truly under a forked stick now and his only salvation lay in a sudden break for freedom. But with the lawman and Carter riding behind him, their eyes ever on the alert, he was powerless.

At length they came abreast the Box M gate. Carter pulled up. "I'll be headin' in, Sheriff," he said. "You won't need my help takin' this huckleberry into town. With them bracelets on he won't cause no trouble. See you later."

He swung through the gate and loped toward the ranch house beyond. A longing overshadowed Bronc's sudden ray of hope. In the house was Barbara Merrett and her kindly old father, probably asleep now, ignorant of the tragedy building about them. In the morning they would know he had been taken. Then they would join the rest of the Whetstone people in condemning him.

"Get movin', Howden," Bengold's crisp voice jarred him from his thoughts. "Sooner we hit Whetstone an' you're in a cell, better I'll feel."

Bronc rode on. The lawman pulled up beside him and for a long time they rode in silence. They were but a few miles from town when it happened. Bronc had been gauging the distance between himself and the lawman for some time. Suddenly he rammed his left spur rowel hard into the pony's flank. With a squeal the surprised animal leaped sideways, banging hard into Bengold's horse.

Before the sheriff could leap his own horse away, Bronc's cuffed hands shot up and closed over his gunbutt. The Colts cleared leather with a hissing sound and Bengold found himself gaping into the menacing bore.

"We've gone far enough, Sheriff!" Bronc rapped wickedly. "I don't like to do this, but I ain't going to be strung up for somebody else's killing! Fish out the keys to these cuffs and loose 'em!"

"You're makin' a mistake, Howden," blustered the lawman. "This'll make it harder for you."

Bronc laughed icily. "You can only hang a man once," he ground out. "Take off these irons!"

Swearing under his breath, Bengold did as bidden. "Now light down and start walking," Bronc ordered. "The exercise'll do you good."

"What do you mean?" Bengold demanded, dismayed.

"Just what I said," Bronc gave back. "Get down and hit the road to town!"

"Its seven-eight miles to there," the lawman protested, but he wasted no time when Bronc eared back the hammer of his gun. He lit down stiffly and Bronc quickly slapped his mount's rump with his loose reins. The horse took off down the road at a gallop.

"And as many to the Box M," Bronc prodded. "Well, so long, Sheriff, and—good hikin' in them high heels!"

"I'll get you for this if it's the last thing I do, Howden," the lawman swore, his face livid with fury. But Bronc was already wheeling his bronc about. He left the tin-star standing there in the road, swearing relentlessly. As he tore away into the gloom he saw him furiously pull his range hat hard down upon his head, turn and start walking toward Whetstone. He grinned and gave spur steel to his mount.

AFTER a stiff ride, Bronc was once more back at the gate of the Merrett Box M spread. Almost by habit he started swinging inside, then curbed his horse abruptly, doubtful of his welcome now that Carter had had time to spread his vicious lies. He wanted to go to the house and tell Barbara and Hurd all that had happened, but decided against it.

The big house loomed darkly there among the mushrooming sycamores. The temptation to visit it was strong. An hour or so had elapsed since Carter had returned, and Bronc reasoned that if he had told of the killing of Taos, the aroused household had already gone back to bed.

He was about to swing his mount back onto the road and head once more toward the Seven Devils when he caught the blur of a rider rolling along the open range beyond the bunkhouse. The thin flutter of hooves came to him, and with them a strong feeling that something was wrong there. He wondered who the rider could be, knowing that in these times of struggle against the renegades, every available man would be out riding night herd to guard against the raiders. Men were gaunt and sleepy-eyed from their vigils and the scant hours of sleep each day. He wondered if perhaps this rider had carried news back to Merrett of another raid and was now on his way back to join in the hunt for the rustlers.

The thought came to him that there was another chance to contact Kingfisher Karp and Shag Howden for a showdown that would forever give him the peace and contentment he sought. Abruptly he rowelled his horse and headed for the house. A short distance from it he halted and lit down to proceed on foot. Careful not to walk deliberately into anything untoward, he skirted the house and came up to the rear.

As he did so he heard a chair falling to the floor as if having been kicked over. Then he heard the scrape of a heavy body along the planking. His first thought was that a fight was being staged inside the house, and then the muffled voice of Merrett reached him.

"Help! Help! The lowdown—" Bronc wasted no time slatting his way through the kitchen door. He saw Merrett lying on the floor, struggling to rise. Quickly he thumbed a match to the suspension lamp. Trussed up like wild steer, a kitchen towel tied about his face, the rancher fought at his bonds and gag furiously.

Bronc's Barlow knife was out in a jiffy, slicing the ropes. The cowman leaped up, breathing hard, and snatching the towel from him.

"Bronc!" he exclaimed, a strange look claiming his eyes. "What you doin' here?"

"Never mind that, Mr. Merrett," Bronc knew what he was thinking. "Just tell me what's wrong."

"Karp and his gang raided us tonight—grabbed the breeding stock I been holdin' here," the rancher gushed in a torrent, "and took Barbara along for good measure!"

"Took Barbara?" Bronc's voice was like steel.

"That's right," said Merrett. "I was fixin' a snack before goin' to bed when they came. All the boys was out ridin' night herd—"

"Where was Link Carter?" Bronc cut in.

"I ain't seen him since he rode north the other day with Tom Bengold to look for that lowdown gang," Merrett said.

Bronc's face clouded. "Then they were trailin' me," he murmured darkly. "Well, maybe I'll do some more trailin' myself right now."

He turned to go. Merrett halted him. "Where are you goin'?" he demanded.

"To look for Link Carter—and Miss Merrett," Bronc said tersely.

"Forget about him," the cattleman rapped. "It's my daughter I'm worried about. Soon as I get into my boots, I'll go along."

"Two's a crowd in this case, Merrett," Bronc warned. "One man might get close to that gang while more would interfere. You just sit tight and let me handle this."

"Like hell I will!" Merrett ground out, but before he could stop him, Bronc was gone out the door. He rushed into the parlor where he'd removed his boots beside his best chair as was his habit in the evening, but by the time he stormed outside, Bronc was a fast-moving blur that disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER IV

Owlhoot Pawn

BRONC HOWDEN roared through the darkness with a heart turned to stone. If he had ever hated Shag Howden before, he despised him com-

pletely now. That his own father could stoop so low as to be a partner in the tearing of a helpless girl away from the protection of her home was beyond his endurance to bear. What, he wondered, could the renegades gain by it? Merrett had been rustled blind. He was on the point of poverty and the longriders could bleed more from him.

All color drained from Bronc's face as he thought of it. He thoughtlessly dug his rowels into his mount's flanks. The running beast squealed under the cruel jab and thundered forward at greater effort. Hot hatred seared Bronc's heart and he knew but one resolve—to find the renegades and kill, and keep on killing until all or himself were dead. Only then could he obtain freedom from the blight that hounded him.

Dawn was but a faint streak across the eastern skies when he caught his second glimpse of the rider he'd seen tearing away from the Box M. This time the man carelessly allowed himself to be outlined against the sky as he topped a ridge. Then he was gone. Bronc pounded along in pursuit, sure in his own mind that it was Link Carter or one of the renegades. He was heading toward the Seven Devils and wasting no time. Here at last would be a definite trail to follow and Bronc grew impatient for daylight.

It came in a blaze of glory that routed the long shadows of the Seven Devils. He picked up the man's trail easily, but one thing remained to puzzle him. That was the failure of Link Carter to find Merrett. Surely he would have heard the cowman's struggles to free himself there in the kitchen.

A thought came to him. Perhaps Link Carter hadn't wanted to find him, or having seen Taos Jones' treasure map, had rushed into the Box M bunkhouse long enough only to grab up a few belongings and head for the oldster's cabin to find the cache. Bengold now possessed the document, but Carter could have stored each landmark away in his mind as he, Bronc, had done at the cabin.

But he told himself that was the least important thing to him now. Barbara's security came first. After that it would be root hog or die for him. Now he concentrated on the trail. It carried him along the same courses he had followed before in his search for the renegade hangout. He was puzzled that he had been unable to trace it to a conclusion and a little way on he discovered the reason.

The tracks of the rider suddenly veered from the trail and disappeared in a wide area of rocky rubble leading up the slants of the Seven Devils. Grimly he followed, groping for a hint of which direction the man had taken. And then his hopes soared. Fresh droppings of the rider's mount gave him a lead that took him behind a screen of scrub pinons edging the rubble. Riding through he found himself staring into a narrow defile that led to a wider box canyon beyond.

Reseating his gun, he started to follow a now well-defined trail up the canyon. But he had gone only a few yards when a thick voice halted him.

"Just a minute, an' be careful with your hands!"

Bronc turned in his saddle, his fingers splayed out over his gunbutt. Slowly his hands came away and settled on kak nubbin. His bleak eyes swept over the tall, clean-shaven oldster standing at the edge of a thick juniper. Half screened behind him was a big, deep-chested claybank gelding, streaks of white lather striping its fine neck. A flat-crowned black JB hat topped the man's graying head. Deep lines coursed down the sides of a full mouth from the corners of steel-gray eyes. His shoulders were broad beneath the faded plaid shirt he wore, tapering down to a thin waist. He wore Coffeyville boots and you could tell by the length of his spurs that he was a hard-riding man. Slanchways around his lean thighs hung hand-tooled cartridge belts, the matching holsters tied hard above the knees. Bronc saw his .45's were the finest, bone-gripped and new, one of which he held now in his gnarled right fist, the hammer eared back beneath a thick thumb.

THERE was supreme confidence and purpose in the man's rather pallid face. That pallor might have been caused by a recent sickness, he thought quickly, or by too much night riding with the moon for a sun. But there was something about the man that startled Bronc. He had seen him somewhere before, he was sure, but it didn't matter now. The man was holding him up when Barbara Merrett needed him.

"Get down and come here!" the other commanded. "This is the end of the line for you, kid."

Fresh fires of anger kindled in Bronc as he lit down and went toward the man, careful to keep his hands away from his gun. He rebelled against the command, but something drew him to the other as irresistably as a moth to a bright light. Silently he condemned himself for being so careless as to ride blindly into the canyon without first scouting it. But it was too late now to make amends for that. His only hope of getting past this renegade stakeout, he thought, was to play a waiting game.

"I might've knowed they'd leave a guard behind 'em to cover the canyon mouth," he said bitterly. "I reckon you're the galoot I trailed last night while you was ridin' drag for them, eh?"

The man's pale eyes bored into his. "You got a lot to learn, button," he chided. "Before you can call yourself a man-hunter. I circled you twice last night and once could've yanked you right out of your kak when you racked past me."

Bronc blinked. "Why didn't you?" he cracked out. "What have they done with Miss Merrett?"

The man's eyes twinkled. "Kind of like her, don't you, Bronc?" he offered.

If Bronc had been surprised before by this man's assertion that he could have tripped him on the trail, he was amazed now at mention of his name.

"How do you know that?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

The man's laugh set up a vague uneasiness in the waddy. "From what folks have been saying around the Whetstone about Shag Howden, you—"

"Shag Howden?" Bronc faltered. "Don't kid me, mister!" his voice was wicked. "Shag Howden was my dad, damn his soul! He never had a shave in his life, nor even washed his dirty neck far as I can recall."

"You ain't seen him in five years I reckon," the other replied mildly. "Time can change a man—time and a chance to think over his wrongs in stony lonesome."

Bronc's laugh was bitter. Unobstrusively he gauged the distance between him and this man. "You're just stallin' to give your pals up there time to get away!" he scourged hotly. "Get out of my way or do your do!"

"You'll find only a quick grave up the canyon," the other said, his pale eyes growing bleak. "I said this was the end of the line for you."

"That's what you think," Bronc ground out, putting his words to action. His left arm flicked out and brushed the other's gun aside. Like a striking sidewinder he darted in, his right smashing hard against the man's chin. Shag Howden staggered back under the impact, caught his spur in a juniper root and fell. Before he could recover, Bronc was upon him, pinioning his arms behind his back. With a piggin string from his pocket he quickly tied him up.

"If you're Shag Howden," he gritted savagely, "you'll have the chance to change your ways in the stony lonesome you mentioned. Right now you'll be cold fruit under this juniper. When I come back this way I'll see that you get a fair trail!"

Half dazed, the oldster tried to shake the cobwebs from his brain as Bronc dragged him under the tree. As he did so the oldster's shirt-front pulled open and then Bronc realized that this man was the parent he'd sworn to kill. The livid scar of an old knife wound crossed his torso from right armpit to left side. Sight of it sent a pang of emotion seeping through him. He smothered it quickly. He owed Shag Howden nothing. This man had brought nothing but misery and bitterness to him, and his outlawry had contributed to Barbara Merrett's predicament.

Savagely he threw him to the ground, tossed his guns out of reach and hurried to his horse. As he vaulted into the saddle, Shag rolled over and called to him.

"Bronc, son!" his voice was filled with warning. "Wait! Listen to me! They'll gun you down! I'm makin' up for what I did—"

But Bronc was roaring up the canyon and in a moment rode out of sight around a turn. Shag Howden groaned, desperation building in his eyes. He struggled at his bonds, the twine cutting into his wrists cruelly and bringing blood. After a moment he lay back, gasping.

COLD fury rode with Bronc Howden up the hidden canyon toward the renegade hideout. He knew no caution now, for in his mind he had formed a plan for the release of Barbara Merrett. A plan, if he moved swiftly, would cheat Link Carter out of the hoard he was unquestionably out for now.

He had not ridden more than a mile and a half before he suddenly found himself surrounded from four sides by a cun-

ningly laid renegade trap. Four gunmen converged upon him from as many points as he came out of the canyon into a wide pocket in the hills. He recognized Kingfisher Karp immediately.

The old renegade was still unkempt as ever. His short, squat body reminded Bronc of a huge toad seated in a saddle. His matted gray beard was stained from tobacco and his close-set shoe button eyes glittered with the same old cruelty. Bronc suddenly recalled that old Shag had once bore the same regenade stamp and he found himself wondering at the change that had come over him.

"Young Howden, hey?" the old hellion croaked as he recognized Bronc. "That's fine, kid. We was fixin' to go callin' in town tonight to fetch you out here."

"How'd you know I'd be there?" Bronc's brows went up.

Karp's beefy lips parted in a wide grin, revealing a toothless mouth. "We got ways of knowin' things, button," he said. "But now that you've come, maybe you'll be able to ride out whole with your gal if you listen to our proposition."

Bronc eyed him coldly. He knew what their offer would be. He'd been prepared to make it himself. But his whole being rebelled at meeting these killers on their own terms, yet there was no other way out if Barbara was to be released.

"I probably wouldn't be interested, Karp," he murmured.

"We'll see," croaked the renegade leader. "You know where Old Taos' cache is. We want it. You want the gal. You'll see we get what we want or neither of you'll ever get out of the Seven Devils. That plain?"

His cruel eyes glittered murderously and Bronc knew he would kill them both without compunction if they opposed him.

"How do I know she's here and safe?" Bronc put to him. "What makes you think I know anything about Taos' cache?"

"You'll see," Kingfisher smirked. "And you'll tell us what we want to know, or by hell we'll take your taw—the hard way!"

Under the guns of the four, Bronc rode sandwiched between them deeper into the canyon to where a couple of other gunmen lounged lazily near a picket line. Behind them stood a small, weathered shack, half-hidden at the side of a huge boulder. As they lit down, Bronc's eyes narrowed on the pair. He remembered them, two remaining members of the old Karp-Howden bunch. Clipper Downs was middle-aged, swart and milk-eyed. His two Colts were tied hard at his thighs and he was known for his gunswift in half a dozen states. Beside him lazed Cinco Fount, another of the same breed. Bronc remembered Shag having a good laugh over Cinco who had cut five notches in his gunheel and stopped there because he couldn't count any further. But this little, moon-faced killer would be a man to reckon with in any kind of a fight, he knew.

Now as Karp slid from his saddle and Bronc greedily eyed his gun stuck in the old renegade's dirty waistband, he realized there would be little chance of opposing this collection of killers. Kingfish called raucously toward the shack and his voice rolled the echoes back and forth across the canyon.

"Hey, Link!" he shouted. "Fetch her out! This is payoff time!"

Link—Link Carter—here with Kingfisher Karp? Bronc was stunned. Never liking the Box M ramrod, he hadn't ever suspected him of any connections with the owlhoot. Now it came to him in a rush—Carter's long rides away from the Box M presumably to hunt for the rustler trail—the unexplained tipping off to the outlaws of carefully hidden herds of cattle, a thing he'd attempted to blame on him to hide his own craftiness. But it puzzled Bronc why Link hadn't told Karp the location of the old patriarch's cache, or gone after it himself.

"If you had half the brains your old man had, Howden," Kingfisher said wolfishly while they waited for Barbara to appear, "we could use you in this bunch. But he made two mistakes."

"What?" Bronc clipped, his eyes on the cabin.

"He got himself pinched after we took a mail train at Champa City," said Karp. "Took a five-year rap. Hear he's out now and—turned lawdog. Can you beat that? Shag Howden a deputy U. S. Marshal! But he'll never outlive that mistake, not if I see him first. I got his name scratched on a slug, kid."

Shock coursed the full length of Bronc's tall frame. Shag Howden—a United States Deputy Marshal! It was unbelievable!

But was that what his father had tried to tell him down the trail and he'd refused to listen? Hope started building within him. Had Shag at last recognized the error of his ways, paid his debt to society

and came out to offer his guns and experience to the law on the old theory that a thief is best fitted to catch a thief? Bronc's brain was whirling. Such a thing was impossible. Many an old owlhooter, he reasoned, had turned lawman and soared to great heights in public esteem.

But it couldn't be with Shag. He'd been a dyed-in-the-wool renegade, and a leopard doesn't chance its spots overnight or in five years. Still, he remembered with a sudden surge of emotion, Shag had looked different back there. He wasn't the same old Shag Howden, loud-mouthed, bragging desperado. There was something fresh and clean about him Bronc had never seen before. And that pallor of face—

Could it really be true, or was Karp simply having sport with him? He couldn't believe Old Shag had taken the straight and narrow. But he could have waylaid him on the night trail. He wondered why he hadn't done so and concluded that the whole thing was crazy, that his father had simply let him come on, expecting to take him at the canyon mouth and perhaps try to initiate him into the gang.

He laughed bitterly. "That's a good one on me, Karp," he ground out. "Outside of my mother, no Howden was ever any good. Folks all say so, don't they?"

CHAPTER V

Powdersmoke Peace

BRONC HOWDEN turned cold as a winter wind when he saw Barbara Merrett shoved roughly from the cabin door by Link Carter, the cadaverous Box M foreman who had formerly taken her orders. Her hair was dishevelled and her eyes reddened from crying and interrupted sleep. But in them burned a glitter of defiance.

"Keep your filthy paws off me, Carter!" she burst out at the ramrod. "If dad was here he'd break you in two!" She saw Bronc. A little cry of surprise escaped her lips, then alarm came to her eyes. She started toward him, but Carter grabbed her arm.

Like a cornered wildcat she turned on him and her sharp nails made three reddening lines down each of his cheeks. He emitted a low curse and gripped her in a bear-like hug to overcome her. Bronc started forward, but that was all. Karp rammed the muzzle of his gun hard into his back.

"Far enough, kid," he laughed. "I ain't had so much fun watchin' them two scrap since that Mexie carved up your old man down Juarez way. Now you start talkin' before we get rough. Where's that cache?"

"Why don't you ask Carter?" Bronc bit out. "He saw the map."

"Yeah," Karp croaked. "But his memory's about as long as his nose. Maybe you can do better, hey?"

Bronc winced as he cruelly rammed his gun-muzzle deeper into the small of his back.

"It'll be hide off his nose if he don't," cut in Carter. "Nothing'd give me more pleasure than to take him apart in little pieces!"

"Tell them nothing, Bronc!" Barbara cried, struggling impotently to free herself from Link's bear hold. "They're a pack of cowardly dogs! I'm not afraid of them!"

"Now ain't she skirted hell on a pump handle," scourged Kingfisher. "Take a little of it out of her, Link, and see if this jigger'll let her holler without talkin'."

Cruelly Carter shoved one of her small wrists up between her shoulder blades and the pain drained all color from her face. But she made no outcry. Again Bronc started forward, this time with a leap, but Karp's ready foot tripped him. He fell sprawling on his face.

"You dogs!" Barbara gritted, and her kicking heels caught Carter on the shins. He let out a groan as his grip loosened upon her. Quick as lightning she ran for Kingfisher Karp, her nails clawing at his bearded face. He gave a startled grunt and amused laughter rippled through the outlaws as he fought to stave her off.

"Somebody grab this hell-kitty before she claws out my eyes!" he croaked, and then his gun arced up.

Bronc saw it and all caution fled from him. As if shot from a catapult he was on his feet and darting in. Before Karp could bring his gun barrel down on Barbara's head, his hand closed in a vise-like grip over his wrist. With a bellow of rage Karp swung to his new antagonist and struggled viciously to pull free.

Bronc knew that it was now or never for him and Barbara, knew they would probably never get out of this renegade hideout alive. But in his frame of mind it mat-

tered little so long as he could take Kingfisher Karp and perhaps a few of his gang into their graves with him.

Just how he did it, he didn't know, but before anyone could stop him he had stripped Karp's gun from his hand. Then he was leaping back as the others went into action, pulling Karp with him. Using the struggling, frightened old hellion as a shield he caught Link Carter's hands streaking to his tied-hard pistols. Just then Kingfisher squirmed away and threw himself behind one of the horses at the picket line, snatching out his other gun with one fell swoop.

"Run for it, Babs!" Bronc shouted, and triggered at Carter.

The cadaverous ramrod's guns were out and on the way up when Bronc's slug caught him in the pit of his flat stomach. A look of awe spread over his face. His guns dropped and his thin hands clamped over his middle. He doubled up and fell forward, never moving again.

The canyon rocked to the concussion of exploding guns. Bronc saw Barbara streaking toward him as he triggered a quick shot at Cinco Fount and missed when the gunman darted behind a horse. Acrid gunsmoke clogged his nostrils and then he was thrusting Barbara behind him. He could feel her body trembling against his own, but it gave him courage. Truly, this was payoff time as Karp had said, but he didn't dare hope he could come out triumphantly in this battle. They stood against him now, five to one. But if no Howden was ever any good, he was resolved to show them that they knew how to die.

Puffs of dust lifted from his sleeves and levi legs as renegade bullets fanned him close. He stood his ground and triggered through the cloud of powdersmoke that rose to obscure his vision, sear his lungs. Then he felt the snag of a bullet through his left biceps. The shock of the lead spun him half around.

The burning agony made his senses reel for an instant, and he shook his head savagely to clear it. Then he saw Fount again as he stepped around the horse's rump to trigger at him.

Sobbing with hate and pain, Bronc threw up his gun. As he was ready to let go the man who could count no more than five suddenly stiffened in his tracks. His gun spun on his trigger finger for an instant and then clattered to the ground. He fell on top of it.

Then Bronc was aware of a lone figure advancing at a slow, deliberate walk up the canyon toward the renegades. He was a gray-haired man, tall, thin-waisted. His shirt hung open in the front and even from the distance Bronc could see the red scar that would mark Shag Howden to his dying day. He held new Colts in each hand and they were exploding now with the rhythmatic motion of idling pistons.

"Thank God," Bronc heard Barbara breathe behind him, and then Shag Howden was abreast of them.

A fierce pride surged through the waddy. There was a strong hunger in his pained eyes now—the hunger of a boy who had been denied the guidance of a real dad and who had suddenly found it. Shag Howden was siding him at last. What Karp had said was true, for in the early morning sunlight Bronc saw that his father now wore a bright new star on the left pocket of his faded shirt.

Gunflame bloomed out at him from behind the string of horses at the picket line. But Shag Howden didn't mind. There was something beautiful and awesome in his steady, unwavering advance upon the renegades, triggering as he walked, unmindful of the death that whistled and slashed about him.

A SUDDEN fear clogged Bronc's throat. His voice was hoarse as he called: "Dad! Don't go closer! They'll kill you!"

Shag Howden's eyes swept him, and there was a longing in them that couldn't be missed. "I was dead for years, son," he gave back. "I'm just beginnin' to live. It ain't for this scum to interrupt it again."

It seemed that Bronc's one word made everything all right between them. In that baptism of fire both understood. Shag Howden had made good, like others before and after him. Like a swaying statue the youngster thrust Barbara to the ground. "Stay down, Babs," he said, and his voice sounded dull and far away. Then he was rushing on rubbery legs to the side of his father.

Together, side by side, they bore down upon the renegades. Panic seized them now. Horse flesh was no longer good

cover. They began darting toward rocks and clumps of brush, and therein lay their ruin.

His left arm hanging useless, blood dripping from dead fingers, Bronc triggered at Clipper Downs. The milk-eyed killer took the lead squarely in the chest. The shock threw his arms up. His guns arced through the air and clattered on the rubble. His one shriek of—"God!"—sheared the crashing gunsound as he fell. Vaguely Bronc thought it was strange this stolid killer could think of his Maker at the moment when death struck him.

He shuddered and glanced at Old Shag. His guns spit flame and lead and Kingfisher Karp was answering, shot for shot. There could be no mistaking that this man was Shag Howden. The toad-like renegade had seen Shag Howden in action too many times before not to know. He alone stood his ground there at the rump of a horse. His evil face was like a bad dream.

"Comin' at you, Karp!" Bronc heard Shag say. "I'd have you last night at the Box M, only I wanted all of you together. You know I always did like my peas in one pod. Makes shellin' easier! Take it!"

His guns bucked as one in his hands. Kingfisher Karp's Colts exploded into the ground. He folded over like a split grain sack and was trampled by the spooky horse that had shielded him. He lay in a pitiful heap in the dust beneath the animal's punching hooves.

Bronc glimpsed one of the remaining renegades throwing down on him from behind a rock. He was so close that the flame from the gun seared him. Something struck him a jolting blow in the side. His last conscious sense told him Shag Howden's guns were exploding beside him. That was all. He didn't see his would-be assassin drop down behind his covert, the top of his head blown off. All he knew now was that a merciful peace settled over him. His legs seemed like rubber, letting him down easily. Bronc Howden was tasting of death and—liked the peace it gave him.

WHEN he regained consciousness his eyes were dimmed, but sight came quickly. He was lying on a clean white bed and someone was sitting beside him, holding his hand. When his vision focused correctly, he saw it was Barbara Merrett. She looked fresh and clean and good, as he had always liked to see her. Her eyes were glistening.

"Oh, Bronc, I've been praying so hard—" she sobbed, and smiled through her tears to match the wan grin that expanded his cheeks.

"I reckon we all have, Miss Merrett," said a heavy voice beyond. Bronc looked for the source and saw Shag Howden looking down at him. Beside him stood Merrett, Tom Bengold and a grave-faced medico. "That's somethin' I learned how to do and if that's what fetched the boy around, it'll be somethin' I'm goin' to learn a lot more about."

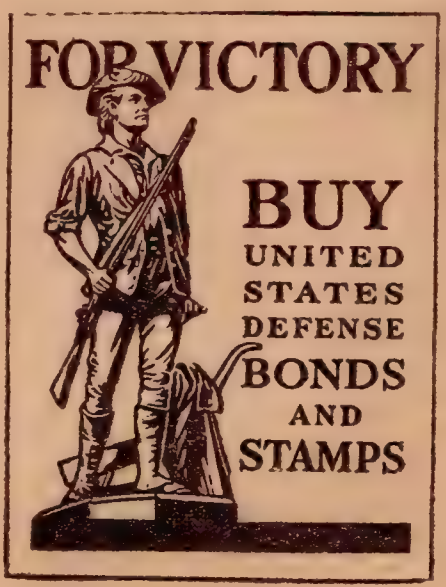
"That, Howden," said Doc Sherman from Whetstone, "wouldn't be a bad idea. It certainly wasn't what I did that fetched him out of it. But he'll be all right now. Crisis is passed. Give him a couple of weeks and he'll be able to enjoy that inheritance he got from Taos Jones—"

"Providin," Bronc suggested weakly. "Providin' Barbara helps me."

"With my blessin'," asserted Merrett. "Thanks to Shag Howden I'll get my cattle back, but I'll be a dad-burned pilgrim if I keep on ranchin' without a ramrod around here!"

But Bronc wasn't listening. All he knew was that Barbara's lips were sweet and warm against his. The rest was meaningless.

THE END



CAREFUL JONES frowned as his boss interrupted his intricate computations with a breezy hail.

"Hey, Careful!" the County Surveyor bellowed: "Come outta thet back room. I want yuh tuh git acquainted with an ole friend uh mine!"

Careful laid down his calipers with a sigh. He smoothed down his rumpled mass of corn-yellow hair and stepped precisely into H. P. Gassoway's office.

The junior surveyor wiped the abstracted, withdrawn look from his freckled, pug-nosed face and smiled slowly as H. P. did the honors.

The County Surveyor introduced Careful to a wispy old nester. But he acted like the oldster was a long-lost, rich uncle. But that was H. P.'s way.

He made back slapping pay rich dividends. He'd been reelected to his office term after term—in spite of his limited qualifications for the job.

"This here ole kiote is Baldy Potter," boomed H. P. jovially. "As white a guy as yuh'll meet in seven states. Baldy, meet my deppity. Careful Jones. He comes by his nickname honestly. Ho-ho-ho! Never known tuh make a mistake. Ho-ho-ho!"

The little old coot was balder than a duck's egg above his leathery ears. But he had a fringe of fine-spun white hair falling to his shoulders. He teetered his chair nervously and watched everything with bright, bird-like black eyes.

Careful mumbled the civilities and pump-handled a gnarled, veined old hand. His intensely blue, serious eyes behind their thick-lensed spectacles measured Baldy levelly. He decided instantly that he liked what they rested upon.

Careful waited expectantly. He sensed

Careful Jones knew that Ames Hostler had some trick up his sleeve in regard to the surveying of the County lines—and he was right. But even Hostler didn't suspect how his devil's game would backfire!

that H. P. was up against something tough. But that was not unusual.

"Well, what yuh goin' tuh do about it?" demanded Baldy. He was evidently continuing a previous discussion.

"Yuh kin take th' matter intuh court," advised H. P. "If yuh think yuh got a case agin Hostler."

"Court, hell!" exploded Baldy. "What good would thet do me? I tell yuh th' devil's sidin' Ames Hostler! Somethin' beyond human power swings thet compass needle off!"

"Now, Baldy," soothed H. P. "I run them lines myself. Be 'bout forty years ago. Jist afore yuh homesteaded. They wuz all hunky-dory then. An' I guess they still are, ole hoss."

H. P. slapped the nester genially on a thin shoulder blade. "But we'll see," he added. "I'll send Careful here, out with yuh tuh check 'em over."

"Why don't yuh come yoreself!" stormed Baldy. His voice grew cracked. "I tell yuh, it's plumb spooky!"

"Now, now, Baldy!"

"An iffen yuh can't git thet township line back where she belongs—an' th' devil back in hell—I'm a gone goslin'! Thet toad-bellied range hawg's got my water fenced off! Claims it's legal. Hurrumpt! Dern him! I'll kill Ames Hostler iffen I don't git my rights! Legal er no legal!"

"Careful," sighed H. P., "I reckon yuh'd better sashay out tuh Buckthorn with Baldy. Investigate this here perambulatin' township line. I'm leavin' the hull thing tuh yore discretion."

Careful asked no useless questions. He put his faith in his transit theodolite and exact work.

The wrath boiled up in Baldy's black eyes. "But hell, J. P.," he snorted. "Hain't this kid kinda young tuh tie intuh th' supernatcheral?"

"Acourse I'd go myself, Ole Timer," J. P. hastened to explain. "But I'm under th' doctor's keer. He's workin' on me day an' night. I'm a mighty sick man."

To prove his point, he coughed hollowly.

"Could be," grunted the skinny, dried up old nester. He chewed his cud furiously. Then he took careful aim at the spittoon. Scoring a bull's-eye, he snorted: "Shore it ain't lack uh exercise, J. P.?"

"Me exercise?" yelped the pained J. P. "Hell, Baldy! I'm all stove up. Ain't got th' old tabasco no more. Exercise 'ud kill me shore. But Careful's got an old head. He'll figger an' out fer yuh. If they is one."

"Hurrumpt!"

"So-long, yuh ole sidewinder! Glad yuh called."

CAREFUL and old Baldy gigged down the steep western slope of the San Jermias range. They were short-cutting into Buckthorn valley.

Their ponies and the led mule packed with Careful's soogans and instruments were caked with dried sweat and the thick trail dust. The sky was an inverted, brassy bowl of near-perfect symmetry, whose lower edge rested on the mesa that swept far to the south. There the mysterious Superstitions were a dark, huddled blob on the horizon.

Buzzards swept overhead in wide-looped spirals. Their searching eyes fastened on the two now perched in a dead mountain ash. These craned their revolting bald heads down from the ash's whitened limbs. They made tentative hops. They half opened their wings and flapped weakly—beating the hot air.

Baldy shook his fist in rage. "Durn Ames Hostler!" he cursed. "I'll shore kill him! Them buzzards is gettin' ready tuh peck th' eyes outta another one uh my starved cow critters. I'm takin' a gander."

He reined his cayuse toward a clump of mesquite that straggled down the slope in an eroded gully.

Careful sat watching the buzzards. He was interested in their antics. Suddenly spurts of flame blossomed in the mesquite!

The hard-ringing crash of Winchesters clapped against his ears!

Careful flattened down on his pony's neck. Instinctively he wrenched the bay around. He dug steel hard into the outraged brute's flanks. He fanned the pack mule with his stetson and speared down the trail. Hot lead stormed around him.

Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed a billowing cloud of milky blue powder smoke. The smudge was lifting nearly beneath the two heavy-flapping buzzards. They now beat the air with frantic wings. The rusty feathered, immense birds seemed to be carried upward on the rising smoke.

Then Careful saw Baldy. The oldster wheeled and stormed after him. His face was distorted with rage.

Twice sudden death whispered to Careful within thirty seconds.

One slug brushed his very cheek. And another punched a round hole in his stetson. It happened as he slapped down at the sluggish pack mule.

But in a dozen jumps the bay rounded a bend in the trail. Careful was out of immediate peril. He reckoned at least a dozen slugs had poured out of the mesquite. And three fast levered Winchesters threw them. He continued to pour it to his cayuse.

Half a mile down the trail the mountain ironed out. It became a wrinkled slope. There Baldy overtook Careful.

The old nester was foaming with fury. He cursed Ames Hostler ferociously. He blessed the fellow's ancestors and possible descendants with fire and brimbstone hereafters.

"I'll larn th' toad-bellied polecat!" he stormed. "Th' idear! A layin' in th' bresh an' tryin' tuh run a whizzer on me!"

"Shore it was Hostler?" queried Careful.

"Shore ez shootin'! Him er his crew. If I'd a been luggin' iron I'd a rid in thar an' vent'lated his gizzard! An' he knows it! Knew I waren't heeled."

"How come, Baldy?"

"Hell! I left Brown Betsy tuh hum! Ain't this spozed tuh be a civilized kentry?"

"It's reckoned to be by some," replied Careful. "But I'm beginning to have my doubts. I don't reckon it's near civilized to try to kill a guy from the brush. Without tellin' him why."

"Well, iffen it ain't!" swore Baldy, "I'll jine Geronimo's band!"

"What for, Baldy?"

"I aim tuh lift a leetle hair again! When I wuz scoutin' fer Fremont he jist turned a blind eye to our Injun tricks. So yuh do th' same, Kid. I'll show yuh somepun. When I git Brown Betsy cuddled under my ear again!"

BUT Careful didn't believe anybody was trying to run a whizzer on Baldy. Those slugs weren't thrown out of the mesquite at him. That hinted quite authoritatively at something else.

In their sudden, emphatic Western way those slugs proclaimed that the young surveyor wasn't welcome in Buckthorn valley!

So Careful cudgelled his brains. He was searching for the answer. He guessed it had something to do with the township line he was going to resurvey for Baldy.

The oldster fell silent. But he waggled his jaws constantly. He mumbled a cud of fine-cut spitting tobacco with his toothless old gums and spat high, wide and handsome.

An hour later their ponies splashed the heavy yellow dust of Buckthorn's one dejected street. They eased down from their tired mounts in the cool gloom of the livery stable.

"Cool 'em out before you dast to water 'em," Careful warned the gangling, pimple-faced hostler.

A dozen mongrel curs scratched fleas industriously. They lolled, panting in the shade of the row of old cottonwoods that lined the street.

A few dejected cayuses stood tethered at hitch racks in high-hopped, hang-head resignation. A seeping stream trickled from one green-scum-covered pool to another. But it faithfully watered the cottonwoods. The great trees' roots inched thirstily down to its slow flow.

Then the stream decided to cross the street beneath a plank bridge. The wooden floor boomed hollowly under each passing pony's hooves. Afterwards the stream got lost in the sandy waste.

"Hungry?" queried Careful.

'Kinda," Baldy admitted.

The Alpine Restaurant beckoned.

"Then let's saunter in here and grab a plate o' hot chuck," Careful invited.

The two entered the fly-specked interior. The only cool thing about the dump was its name. It was connected with the Cattleman's saloon by an arched passage. Sounds of convivialty drifted in to them.

Three cow-prods fogged past. They were trying to outrun the dust cloud following fast after them.

For the afternoon west wind was beginning to sough across the heat-blanketed mesa.

"Them's three of Hostler's hands," pointed Baldy. "Shouldn't wonder a mite if they waren't th' lobos who tried tuh dry-gulch us back yonder on th' mountain.

Careful thought it was extremely likely.

A sallow waitress teetered in on high heels. She was visibly annoyed. She announced languidly:

"We got cold roast pork and bread and butter and dried apple pie. And maybe cawfee. If the cook's got the fire up. Which

isn't likely—with the weather as hot as it is."

The two wayfarers studied the situation carefully. They started to put their heads together. But the waitress sniffed audibly. And told the world in general—and Careful and Baldy in particular:

"I'm tired of waiting table for shiftless, ornery cow-pokes. They hang around the barroom all day. Then they stagger in pop-eyed in the middle of the afternoon and demand vittles. Why don't they get their meals on time?"

"There is a thought there," sighed Careful. "Why, indeed?"

"What'll it be, Gents?" suggested the waitress.

An irresistible urge to wax jocular overcame the usually sober-sided Careful. The contrast between the real peril that had threatened him on the mountain and the hectoring of the shallow, artificial waitress had him giggling hysterically. "Make mine quail on toast," he tittered.

"Surely," sniffed the waitress. "Quail on toast it is. But it'll taste exactly like roast pork sandwiches."

She flounced, and surveyed Baldy.

"I fairly dote on pork sandwiches," lied Careful manfully.

"I dunno," doubted Baldy. "I never did like pork."

"Baldy!" hissed the scandalized Careful. "Take what is set before you by the Queen of the May without grousing! Pretend that cold sidemeat sandwiches and colder coffee is ambrosial nectar! Just pretend!"

"Yuh kin do th' pretendin'," objected Baldy. "I'm stickin' up fer my stummick's rights!"

"By all means, Baldy. Soothe it with a nice, fat piece of pork. Cold and lard-like."

"Seems tuh me I been eatin' hawg meat all my life," complained Baldy. "An' I never did like it. Hain't yuh got a lump uh beef?"

"No! We haven't!" the uncompromising waitress snapped.

"Baldy!" giggled Careful. "This ain't th' common, garden variety of hawg that nesters eat!"

"Yuh tellin' me?" belly-ached Baldy. "I'll bet he's tougher'n ole Billy Hell!"

"No! No! This here favored critter is downright succulent! He'll fairly melt in yore mouth!"

"Hurrumpt! I bet he won't!"

"He is truly fit to be served by the Queen of Sheba who graces this abode of good cheer!" cackled Careful.

BUT his nonsense fell on barren soil. Baldy never cracked a smile, and the waitress replied acidly:

"No use trying to soft-soap me! Thank heaven, this is my last week here! I'll sure be glad to get back to Phoenix, where there's some life. And where the gents appreciate a re-fined girl who's had advantages. Even if I do say it who shouldn't!"

"We'll shorely miss our desert rose," giggled Careful.

"You can forget the comedy," flounced the sallow desert rose. "I got a steady, reliable friend in Phoenix. A gent a girl can depend on."

"None but the reliable deserve the fair," misquoted Careful sadly. "Can we have our coffee now? Or will you serve it later as a demi-tasse with our pie?"

The offended waitress rustled huffily out. Careful grinned like a well-fed cat. But he remarked gloomily to Baldy:

"Th' poor gal's just another Pickle-Puss. And she's blind to boot!"

"Why?" demanded Baldy.

"Can't she see I'm the handsomest bachelor in the whole County? And without a present heart interest?"

"Son," grunted Baldy, "You may have a heart uh gold. But th' least said 'bout yore looks th' soonest mended."

"Baldy!" chirped the scandalized Careful. "You do say the strangest things!"

"But I'm prayin' tuh th' good Lawd yore brains exceed yore beauty. Yore goin' tuh need a few when yuh tie intuh th' devil!"

Careful had the grace to blush. But his wide grin still held.

From the Cattleman's saloon came the twanging, musical Plank-Plank, of an expertly picked banjo. Then a mouth organ started tootling and a dozen voices roared out "The New River Train" in rough and ready harmony.

"Oh she took me in her parlor, and she cooled me with her fan," scampered the swingy, lilting old ditty.

High-heeled boots began jigging to the refrain.

Three cow-prods came waltzing through the archway into the Alpine Restaurant. They were noisily exhilarated with the quick

slugs of Bourbon they'd downed at the bar. The music had them as soulful as a coyote yap-yapping at the moon."

"An' she whispered low in her mother's ear, 'I love thet gamblin' man!'" they bawled, out of time with the music.

They spied the sallow waitress, bringing in Careful's hogmeat sandwiches. One bellowed:

"Hi yuh, Toots! Yore my sweetie! Ain't yuh, Toots!"

"Naw! Toots is my sweetie!" claimed another.

"She ain't either yourn!" clamored the third. "Flora-Dora's my precious. We air gittin' married! Ain't we, precious?"

The indignant waitress rustled her feathers in disdain. She stared coldly at the obstreperous three.

"Them's Hostler's men," whispered Baldy. "If I wuz luggin' iron I'd make 'em drag their tracks out with their yeller bellies!"

The tall, skinny cow-prod kicked over a chair. He grabbed Pickle-Puss around the waist. He stamped down with jingling spurs and swung her high, wide and handsome.

"Thet's Lippy Heber," explained Baldy. "He's meaner'n a penned lobo. But he's yeller. Th' leetle runt is Wahoo Kleist. He's a squallin' ole tomcat. An' t'other's Sad Sam Shaggs. I dunno's I gotta urge tuh tangle with him. I figger he's a killer."

Pickle-Puss still carried her high-held tray.

"Unhand me, sir!" she screeched in the best amateur theatricals manner. "Unhand me, you villain!"

A dozen flushed waddies piled through the archway. The cook sauntered out of the kitchen. He stood watching with narrowed eyes. And he carried a cleaver.

The infuriated Pickle-Puss was now gyrating wildly in Lippy's arms. The tray crashed to the floor with Careful's hog meat sandwich.

The girl screamed. Then she slapped Lippy hard with her open palm. But in spite of her struggles he held her tightly.

The banjo and mouth organ stopped short. The Buckthorn townies drew into a hostile, watching half-circle behind the three Hostler waddies.

But they were still silent and undecided. Although the cook had his cleaver poised.

"Them wart hawgs hez got th' bull town bluffed!" sneered Baldy. "Hell! If I wuz luggin' iron I'd tie intuh 'em like a bitin' sow!"

CAREFUL pushed back his chair and unlimbered his gangling six foot frame. He drawled lazily:

"Thet's enough, Lippy. Unhand the lady. As she requests."

"Sez who!" yelped the hilarious cow-prod.

As though to emphasize his defiance, he swung Pickle-Puss all the faster. She swept around dizzily now, her hair and skirts flying. She screeched like a singed cat as she rotated and slapped and scratched.

"Sez me," Careful grinned. His intensely blue, serious eyes were bland behind his spectacles, and a pair of dimples nudged into his cheeks.

At that moment Pickle-Puss got in her best scratch. The surprised Lippy let go of her. And she swayed back, dizzy as a cat, and stumbled to the floor. But she scrambled up quick and ran crying from the room.

Hostler's three cow-prods speared uneasy, searching glances at the crowd. What they saw sobered them. So Sad Sam Shaggs and Wahoo Kleist only let their maulies flutter over their gun butts.

They didn't quite dare to shuck iron and start a shooting fuss. They hadn't built up a justifiable killing case yet.

For it was a cinch the crowd was hostile. Hang-rope retribution would overtake them if they centered lead on an unarmed man.

But Lippy made his play. It looked safe. For he fancied his chances as a bruiser. He challenged:

"Take them cheaters off, yuh four-eyed teacher's pet! Er git ready tuh crawl if yuh dasn't.

"I'm too tall to crawl," grinned Careful.

"If it wasn't agin th' law tuh paste a man with glasses on, I'd break yuh in two an' spit on th' best half of yuh!" roared Lippy. "I'd tromple yore lights out! I'd pull yore eyes out an' use 'em fer taw markles! Take them cheaters off if yuh dast!"

To the fellow's surprise, Careful did dare! He handed his glasses to Baldy. Then he scuffled in toward the narrowly watching Lippy with his left flickering.

His left maulie flashed out three times like a rivet hammer. It bashed claret from the waddy's pulped nose. Then he followed with a short, chopping right.

Lippy was astonished. But he got over it

quick. He put his head down like a hooking bull and charged.

He came hard, throwing bellows of rage and curses. He windmilled his bony, broken-knuckled maulies like flails. He tried to beat Careful down by the sheer power of his onslaught.

But Careful circled. And avoided the savage rushes. His left still flickered out in sharp stinging jabs.

Presently Lippy grew winded. Then Careful stepped in. He drove a terrific left hook to the fellow's liver. Lippy bleated with pain and sat down suddenly. He rocked to and fro and sobbed for breath.

Careful replaced his glasses on his snub nose without enthusiasm. He didn't relish fighting. So when he had to, he figured to expend the minimum of effort necessary to win.

Nobody but Careful noticed Sad Sam creeping back into the barroom. His intensely blue eyes still held their usual interested, calm look. But he was watching every move Hostler's men made.

The townies crowded in. They shook his hand and slapped his back in admiration. Lippy's licking was highly relished.

Sad Sam suddenly whirled through the arch. He stabbed for his six-gun. But as it cleared leather, Careful countered by simply stepping sideways!

Then the bulky cook stood between him and sudden death! Sad Sam glared in fury. But he didn't dare to reenter the restaurant. So regretfully he dropped his iron back in its holster.

Then he tore out of the Cattleman like a bat out of hell. The crowd all had their backs to Sad Sam. So nobody saw that gun play but Careful himself.

Lippy and Wahoo Kleist slunk out after their pal.

"Come on, Baldy," invited Careful. "We've got a job to do; so let's spit on our hands and fly at it. While our health still holds."

As the two nudged their rested cayuses out of the livery stable's cool gloom. Baldy grunted:

"Thet's Ames Hostler. 'Pears tuh be dressin' down hiz gun-guards. I allus claimed yuh'd raise a stink if yuh stirred carrion."

CAREFUL took a quick gander at the slightly stooped, middle-aged man who straddled a sweet, star-faced chestnut. Every proud move of the pony hinted at blooded ancestors. He carried a full stamped, round-skirted saddle. Its cantle was covered with a single strip of embossed, hammered silver.

Hostler's long thin upper lip was adorned with a gray, close-clipped mustache. His black frock coat was expensively cut. So were his tan vest and trousers. The latter were stuffed into tooled Spanish leather boots.

A great gold chain was looped across his lean stomach and a fine gray stetson was pulled low on his forehead.

He was tongue-lashing his hangdog hired hands as Careful and Baldy approached him. He dismissed the three. They speared thankfully off toward the west.

Hostler held up a slim white hand. Careful and Baldy accepted his invitation to palaver. They reined up facing him.

Hostler wasted no time in coming to the point. But he buttered his words with a forced, mechanical smile. It was plain to the young surveyor that the man knew why he was in Buckthorn. And that the knowing made him furious. Even though he rode his temper with a Spanish curb.

"What makes him so hot under the collar?" Careful wondered to himself. "And how did he find out so quick what I'm doing here?"

Hostler began: "I see yuh been listenin' tuh Baldy's threadbare tale. 'Bout how he'd been done outta his water hole by a black-hearted stranger. Meanin' me, tuh be precise."

"Maybe yes, and maybe no," grinned Careful. "It's my job to listen careful to both sides when there's a dispute over section lines. Then I just get out my transit and check those lines mighty fine. Usually both men are satisfied when I finish."

"Hell!" burst out Hostler hotly. "They ain't but one side tuh this dispute! It's been proved by a dozen surveys!"

"If they're correct another won't hurt you," said Careful obstinately. "Mistakes have been made."

"Meanin' yuh don't make none," sneered Hostler. "Careful by name an' nature, hey?"

"Careful is, as careful does," smiled the surveyor.

"Well yuh better step light eround here!" snarled Hostler. "An' be mighty careful, too!"

Without a farewell salute he wheeled his chestnut and fed bloody steel to the sleek pony. The startled brute pounded the gumbo in a dead run. Hostler speared out across the mesa. He soon overtook his three cow-prods.

"So they's only one side to this dispute," mused Careful. "Then why doesn't the gentleman want me to run the lines again?"

"The hell they ain't two sides!" Baldy chimed in bitterly. "Lemme tell yuh different. If he waren't a land hawg he'd let me an' th' rest of us livin' on the east side hev water!"

"Won't he?"

"No! He wants my two sections! He's froze out all the other homesteaders. An' some of them pore devils been here all their lives!"

"No wonder the Buckthorn townies appear to hate his guts!"

"They shorely do. He's shut most of 'em off from water."

"What reason does he give for being so hard-boiled, Baldy?"

"Claims in my case thet I want tuh run sheep an' stink up th' water!" exploded Baldy.

"Do you?"

"Hell! I despise sheep! An' my pappy afore me depised 'em! But thet don't help me none! I can't git a cupful of water from my own spring! I've sold all my cow critters. 'Ceptin' a few ole mossy-horns hidin' out in th' San Jermias breaks. I ain't been able tuh haze 'em out yit. But they'll all be dead afore long. Them leetle seeps they been waterin' at is dryin' up fast."

"What will you do then, Baldy? Sell?"

"I reckon th' County Farm's due tuh git another boarder right soon. But I won't sell tuh Hostler! I'll kill him fust! So yuh best git th' devil back in hell! An' my line straightened!"

The old rancher mumbled his cud and flailed his arms in rage.

Baldy's trail angled southeast. A furlong out of Buckthorn it ran against a new barbwire fence. It ran mile after mile due north and south on the township line.

"Lookit thet devil's invention!" Baldy swore.

NOW the two riders moved straight south. They hugged the wire fence. Close on the west side, a little stream trickled and pooled through a curving hollow in the flat mesa.

Only when it neared Buckthorn did it meander across the township line and under the fence. Then it seeped through the town with diminished flow and lost itself in the desert beyond.

"Before Hostler built thet fence all th' small outfits watered in thet crick," explained Baldy. "Now Hostler owns everything tuh th' west. An' most of th' good claims this side."

"Where do they water, Baldy?"

"Hostler opens a gate. An' his cows run bawlin' tuh drink. But mine stay on this side. An' just bawl. Hell!" grieved Baldy. "It's enough tuh make a preacher swear!"

"And yore no preacher," grinned Careful.

"It wouldn't be so hard tuh take!" swore Baldy. "Iffen thet dum-swizzled spring didn't rise spang outta my land! Er did, afore th' devil pulled thet township line over!"

"We'll see," soothed Careful. "My compass don't lie."

But later he was willing to doubt that statement.

Four miles south of Buckthorn the wire fence made a half mile jog to the east. Then it ran south a half mile before swinging due west again to rejoin the meridian township line.

"How come?" queried Careful, as the two rode around the enclosed quarter section to reach Baldy's ranch beyond.

"Hostler paid Pappy Marret nine prices fer it," explained Baldy. "So natcherally th' ole coot sold. Dunno's I blame him none. But what Hostler wanted with it gits me. Porest claim in th' valley. Kinda high'n gravelly."

"It adds a whole mile to his fence," mused Careful.

"It sure does. Th' hull claim ain't wuth th' cost of thet extry fence," said Baldy.

"Hum," figured Careful. "Doesn't seem too efficient."

"Efficient?" screeched Baldy. "Hell! Hostler don't know th' meanin' of th' word!"

"Why not?"

"If he had, he wouldn't built thet hay shed atop a big boulder! Tell me why he did that, if he's efficient!"

Baldy pointed to a rough shed stuffed with swale grass hay. It stood in the southeast corner of the single claim.

"They's a monstrous big rock spang under thet shed," he said. "How come?"

"I wouldn't know," answered Careful. But he wondered. It seemed an odd place to build.

He looked at the stream wandering north. Its source was a great spring bubbling from the gravelly blue clay not far from the shed.

It watered the land for over four miles. But its life giving waters were denied Baldy's cattle by the wire fence.

"See?" explained Baldy. "Thet spring used tuh be in my northwest corner. Now th' devil's hauled th' township line east. So it belongs tuh Hostler. What yuh aim tuh do 'bout it?"

"Find out the truth," answered Careful.

He got to work promptly. He found a couple of Mexican kids to carry chain. He got one break. The base township line crossed the meridian line only two miles south.

So he got out his notebook and set up his instrument. He ran careful lines to the various described witness trees and rocks. They checked perfectly with his notes. So far so good.

He had an absolutely correct starting point. All he had to do was to run north on the original compass variations. That line would be Baldy's correct western boundary.

Ancient run lines must be resurveyed on the variation of the compass needle from the true north that prevailed when the first survey was made. For the magnetic pole keeps shifting farther east of the true north pole year after year.

Careful checked each stake to a frog's hair as he moved north over the low rolling ground. Although he could nowhere see the fence ahead for more than a quarter of a mile, it was a situation merely calling for exact work.

He was certain he'd come out where he belonged.

His survey followed the line fence exactly! He might have been dropping his stakes in the very holes made by Hostler's surveyors!

Careful ran the survey again. He got the same result. Then he tried Baldy's north boundary. It came out correct, checking with the east and west line.

But an odd thing puzzled him. He couldn't locate the described witness trees! And it was strange the notes made no mention of the spring or the big rock under the hay shed! They were the most obvious witnesses anywhere close!

He sat down to mull it over. "Be quiet. And let me think!" he snapped at the lamenting Baldy. "This line will be put where it belongs before I finish. Mebbe somebody made a mistake. But I won't. Not to please you. Or Hostler. Or the devil."

A picture built up in Careful's mind. He saw fat H. P. Gassoway, the County Surveyor. He knew the back-slapping old coot was bone lazy.

LIKELY enough he'd been just as lazy forty years ago. When he'd surveyed the mesa for the Government. By contract.

He'd set the township corner posts carefully. With witness trees and rocks correctly noted. But he'd merely squint through his transit and keep his chain men straight away for the section lines. It saved a fat man a lot of walking.

Careful slapped his leg. Then he mounted his pony and rode south. A high knoll reared up a mile south of his starting point.

He set up his instrument and squinted north. He could follow the fence's course across every dip and roll. He was certain H. P. had stood exactly there forty years ago.

At first he couldn't believe his eyes! For on approaching Baldy's north line, the fence plainly swerved to the east! Then, after passing the spring, it angled back again!

The jog was like a wide, shallow V. And its apex pointed at Hostler's hayshed!

Careful rode back and climbed through the barbwire fence. His compass needle fluctuated violently. Then it pointed straight at the hayshed!

The young surveyor kicked the hay aside until he reached the gray rock. He knew it had magnetic properties.

It was a witness for the devil and Ames Hostler!

How Hostler had discovered it was immaterial. He'd bought Pappy Marret out and made full use of it. After discovering the section corner notes were false, he'd boldly ran a new survey.

And a dozen trustworthy men would swear they ran exactly by the compass! And believe they were right! For they'd never bothered to go back on the hill and see

with human eyes unblinded by a witness for the devil!

There was one sure way of correcting the wrong.

Careful rode into Buckthorn that afternoon. He took his pack mule. He bought two picks and shovels. And four boxes of blasting powder.

"I figure to dig a well for Baldy," he informed the storekeeper. "If I strike water Baldy will be able to make out."

"Too bad," replied the sympathetic storekeeper. "I wuz hopin' yuh could tie a knot in Hostler's tail. Th' dern land hawg! But he's shorely shot with luck!"

Careful knew what the man was thinking. That Baldy's chances of striking water were slim. He thought the same.

But he started to dig a shaft that same evening. Then, when darkness fell, he slipped through the barbwire and dug steadily all night beneath the huge, half-buried meteorite resting under the hay shed.

Each morning he and Baldy covered up their coyote holes and scattered hay over the dug earth. They made a pretense of working on the well.

For Careful had glimpsed mounted watchers peering down at them from distant knolls. Hollister would be within his legal rights if he threw them off his land.

The two pounded steadily into the gravelly earth and scooped out the hard-grubbed rubble.

On the fourth afternoon they were trying to doze. But the flies tormented them. The youngest Mexican chain bearer tiptoed in. He handed Careful a note. It read:

"Honored Sir: I trust you will pardon the great liberty I take in inditing this epistle to you. But, Sir: Your life is in great danger. Ames Hostler has discovered that you are digging under his hay shed. He bears you great ill will. He will attack you tonight. He will come with many armed men. Sir, Beware!

"A Friend."

"Good old Pickle-Puss!" grinned Careful. "Nobody but her could put such stilted words on paper with those precise, angular strokes of a pen! But bless her heart. She means well."

"Which same's more'n Ames Hostler does," grunted Baldy. "We best git ready tuh receive him in a fittin' manner. He's a high-an'-mighty galoot. Reckon I'd better stuff Brown Betsy's gullet with silver bullets?"

Careful made a quick decision. He could either fight or run.

"We've got a hole under each corner," he said. "The four boxes of powder ought to lift her. Soon's it's dark we'll load them. And try and blow that rock to Kingdom Come before Ames runs down on us. But if we don't—"

"I gotta pocket full uh .45-70's," cackled Baldy. "They'll suit Brown Betsy tuh a T. She'll spit 'em out like a lady. Knock Hostler an' hiz lugs fer a hull row uh barns. He-he-hee!"

"I'll take old Scatter-Puss," said Careful. "Load her with buckshot, Baldy. I never could hit the side of a barn with a rifle."

An hour after dark Careful climbed out of a hole. He rumpled his corn-yellow hair and drank in great gulps of the night air. He was trying to clear his head of the nitro fumes.

THE last fuze was laid. And Baldy was tamping their final charge. In another minute red fire would run sputtering up the fuzes. Then if all went well the Devil's Witness would be blown to hell-and-gone.

Careful stared up at the mountain behind. Its bleak outlines were softened by the night. And on beyond to an infinity of low-hung bright worlds glittering in cold purity against a purple back-drop.

Against that setting, hate and violent death seemed unthinkable.

Then drumming hoof-beats thundered out of the night! A hard-bitten gun-crew swirled around the lonely shed and worked hard at their trade! A dozen ghostly riders fanned a storming sheet of lead! It smashed the shed's flimsy battens and ricocheted off the exposed rock!

Hostler's rannihans swarmed in. They yelled and whooped.

But Baldy crouched in his hole and blasted back with Brown Betsy's soft-nosed slugs. The surprised gun-herd—who'd expected to overwhelm a pair of unarmed men—dropped back.

But red and yellow and orange muzzle-blooms gouted in the darkness. And echoing thunderclaps kept crowding back from the craggy outposts of San Jermias.

The echoes beat against Careful's ears. A sharp, acrid powder reek drifted on the thin night air and stung his nostrils.

Careful held the shotgun. But not yet

was it cuddled to his cheek. There was no sense in letting the old muzzle-loader pow until the rannihans came within good close range. He didn't believe he could reload it in the dark.

A horse screamed his death-struck agony. High and shrill. His rider catapulted over his head as he went down. The fellow cursed blasphemously. Then he levered up and limped away.

"Got th' son!" Baldy crowed, as another rider, ghostly in the blanketing dark, slipped from his hard running cayuse.

The concealed two heard him groan weakly. Then the gun-herd thundered past again. Two leaned low and dragged the wounded man away.

Hostler's crew began to circle in Indian style. Slung low against their ponies' sides, they fanned their iron under their mounts' necks as they pounded past the shed.

"Kinda hostile, ain't they?" chuckled Baldy. "We air a promisin' hope fer an early funeral."

His words were pointed by the slugs smashing into the shed.

"Hell!" encouraged Careful. "We're safe and respectable!"

"Sez you!" jeered Baldy. "I'm kinda tired uh bein' safe an' respectable anyway. I lifted Injun hair when I wuz a kid. An' I'm enjoyin' this fuss. I feel skittish as a colt."

"It's your second childhood overtakin' you," warned Careful. "Lay those billy-doos in a little closer, Baldy. Yore missin' most conspicuously."

Brown Betsy roared. Another pony coughed and went down.

"That's more like it," encouraged the four-eyed kid surveyor who'd never dragged iron in battle in his life.

"Run down on 'em!" screamed Hostler. "I'll give a thousand dollars tuh th' man who vent'lates their karkasses. I want thet meddlin' surveyor's liver brung me! An' I want tuh see thet lyin' ole bag uh bones stretched dead afore my eyes! Run down on 'em, boys!"

Savage, awful curses bubbled from his lips. He screamed in a frenzy. But the deadly, venemous brute never ventured to leave his forted rock pile two hundred yards from the shed.

He hung tight there. He was flat on his belly, pumping lead from a .32-40.

"Lookit!" exulted Careful. "We got 'em licked. They are starting to edge back!"

But he'd ran past himself. He bragged too soon. There was more powder to burn and hate to vent before the fuss ended.

"Blood an' thunder!" squeaked Baldy. "They hev set th' hay afire! Now I'm ready tuh sell out cheap!"

"I ain't cut my askin' price none," grinned Careful. "Keep yore shirt on."

"Till it burns off. Which will be soon, Kid."

BRIGHT flames belched from the shed's far end. They ran crackling up through the dry shake roof. And along the top and sides of the tinder like hay.

The quick licking flames were like hot snakes' tongues. A pall of gray smoke rose in a choking column. Straight up to the sky it climbed.

Then it turned slowly over and sucked raggedly back to the ground. There it fanned out wide in curling waves.

The gun-herds' circle thinned out wide from the glare. They were but dim-lit running shades in the smoky light.

But the vicious brute behind his rock fort clung tight to his safety. He cranked and fired his Winchester as fast as he could work the lever.

Now Hostler was screaming in triumph. He was sure of his victims now. They could either stay where they were and be roasted—or dart out and be downed by his gun-hung riff-raff.

"We gotta bust outta here," said Careful mildly. "Our hides will start scorching in a minute. And no telling when those charges will catch and go, Boom."

"Yuh utter words uh wisdom, my boy," cackled Baldy. "Tell me more."

"I figure our best bet is to fade back and skin through that barbwire," explained Careful. "Then we can possibly dodge back to your cabin. Anyway, they'll have to step down off their cayuses to follow us."

"But they don't have to step down to throw a pound uh slugs in our pore backs!" hooted Baldy. "We'll make a right nice target whilst we air runnin' away!"

"Hell, Baldy! They can't hit us in the dark! And who wants to live forever anyway!"

Careful's voice was hearty and encouraging. But his smile was slightly on the sickish side. He had imagination. So he was wondering how it would feel when the stunning, smashing lead knocked him kicking. But that was better than the fire.

"I'm plumb sartin I ain't goin' tuh live forever," gloomed Baldy. "Jist as sartin' ez I am thet those lugs won't miss my pore back."

"I'll go first!" promised Careful bravely. "That'll give you lots of encouragement. And I'll tell you what, Baldy! Be sure the fuzes are lighted before you follow me!"

"Yuh tryin' tuh dump th' Devil's Witness in Holster's lap?"

"That's the idea, my good man!"

"Harrumpt! Your idears are mighty brilliant. But do they always work? An' lemme tell yuh somethin'. I aint' a good man. I never wuz. I despise 'em!"

"So do I. I'm ready, you old heller!"

"I'm like the cat with th' singed tail," said Baldy dryly. I can't stop tuh argify. What difference does it make whose kitten lapped th' cream offen th' lady's milk? Take it on th' high lope, Kid!"

"Here I go, Baldy!"

"Baldy Potter'll be steppin' on yore heels when yuh go intuh th' bresh, my fine feathered young rooster!"

Careful watched a smoke cloud tumble down. He sucked deep gulps of air into his lungs. Then he gritted his teeth and spun out into the choking folds.

He darted around the corner and sprinted hard for the fence. The smoke raised a corner of its curtain. And a dozen six-guns blasted at him.

Slugs reached with leaden fingers to catch him. They whined and snarled. They were whispering that death walked close to his side.

But he held fast to old Scatter-Puss and pumped his legs. He ran bent low. He scampered over the ground fast.

But half-way to the fence, he realized he'd never make it. He felt slightly safer from the blasting guns behind. But Lippy Heber and Wahoo Kleist and Sad Sam Shaggs were slamming fast down the wire! They had him cut off from the fence and possible safety!

"Here's where I collect a thousand easy bucks!" whooped Lippy. "Jist watch me knock th' kid's liver loose!"

Careful dropped instantly behind a small-piled heap of stones. He cuddled old Scatter-Puss to his cheek.

But a revulsion of feeling kept him from pressing the triggers. He'd never centered iron on a human being in his life. So he merely watched.

Lippy lammed down fast. The leaning rannihan lined his six-gun on Careful's brisket. He saw the flame spurt out.

The slug chipped rock splinters from the boulder beside him. They stung his cheek. Startled, he jerked back.

The old muzzle-loader, stuffed with a fistful of buckshot, powed loud. It kicked back with wondrous authority. It knocked Careful pizzle end upward. Blood streamed from his bashed nose.

But it sang a song of Jerusalem's Golden Morning to the three charging rannihans. It stuffed their ears with eternal silence.

LIPPY hung doubled over the wire fence. His head was down. A pool of blood dripped and clotted beneath him. Tomorrow blowflies would crawl greenly through the brown-splotched grass. Others would mumble lazily above that drying clot of blood.

Wahoo Kleist and Sad Sam Shaggs slunk up to the gates of hell with their tall, skinny pard. The storm of buckshot literally cut them in two.

Now the back of the treacherous attack was broken. Only the .32-40 was belching hate when Baldy ran panting out. For Hostler still levered his hot repeater vengefully.

The oldster dropped thankfully by Careful's side.

"I'm waitin' here fer th' fireworks," he explained. "Them four boxes uh powder air due tuh go off any second now. Creashun'll rock back on her pore heels when they jar loose!"

"She'll likely totter some at that," agreed Careful cheerfully. He sopped the blood streaming from his nose with a fine linen handkerchief.

W h o o m! Whoom-whoom! bellowed three of the charges. It was almost a single tremendous clap. Then a split second the fourth woke up and roared too.

Hell let loose all holds.

The blazing hay shed shot bodily up in the air! It appeared to float up and up on the fast rising cloud of white smoke. Hundreds and hundreds of feet it soared above the earth.

The mushrooming, giant puffball was crowned by a mass of leaping red flames. These began spilling back. A fiery, blazing cascade of horrendous beauty poured out of the heavens for long minutes.

Then tons of rock and clods rained down.

You made the break from that devil's penal colony okay, Kloster — but you left Julian Simms in hell for a hostage. Better say your prayers, now, Kloster, because Simms is free and

"YOU'LL BE DEAD AT ELEVEN"!

And you, Mister Reader — you still have time to get this topnotch thriller by

FREDERICK C. PAINTON

in the September issue of

Crack Detective

And that's only the beginning!

T. W. FORD

takes you into a quiet little madhouse where nothing is as it seems to offer up a case of

"MURDER FOR A MANIAC"

RAOUL SCHUMACHER

tells of the search for a lost hick, which led through whining bullets to explain why

"TOUGH GUYS DIE LAUGHING"

ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

comes through with the gripping story of

"THE COP IN THE STEEL COFFIN"

You'll find all these and more in this all-star issue.

Don't Miss It!

10c on All Stands

Fine-shifting dirt followed in a gradual rain. The fire in the sky died. The smoke cloud bellied away on the night breeze.

Careful looked up. He felt himself gingerly, wondering if he was still all in one piece. Then old Baldy scrambled up. He was subdued but cheerful.

"Glory be!" he cackled. "Thet was shore a stunner! An' lookit them kiotes feedin' steel tuh their cayuses."

"Yep," grinned Careful. "It was sure an eyeful. But I reckon Hostler's Witness for the Devil has been blasted to hell-and-gone. Now I can run a true line and put your spring back in your back yard where it belongs."

It was true. Ames Hostler could lean on his false witness no more. And in the end it turned against him.

Feeble moans came from where he'd worked his smoking repeater. He lay there —crushed to earth by a great lump of the falling meteorite.

His flat mottled eyes stared back vindictively at Careful.

"Hell ... I've had ... had ... bad luck," he gasped. "Should ... should a killed you fust day yuh come snoopin' in. Instead ... instead uh only tryin' tuh skeer yuh off. J. P. warned me too. Told me yuh was too gosh awful careful."

"Why did he send me then?" asked Careful. He knew there was nothing he could do for the dying man.

"Because ... because I wouldn't stuff his fat paws with money no longer! But I'll git ... git even with him yit. Even ... with..."

The crushed villain gasped and died.

The Witness for the Devil had claimed its own!

32 MORE PAGES!

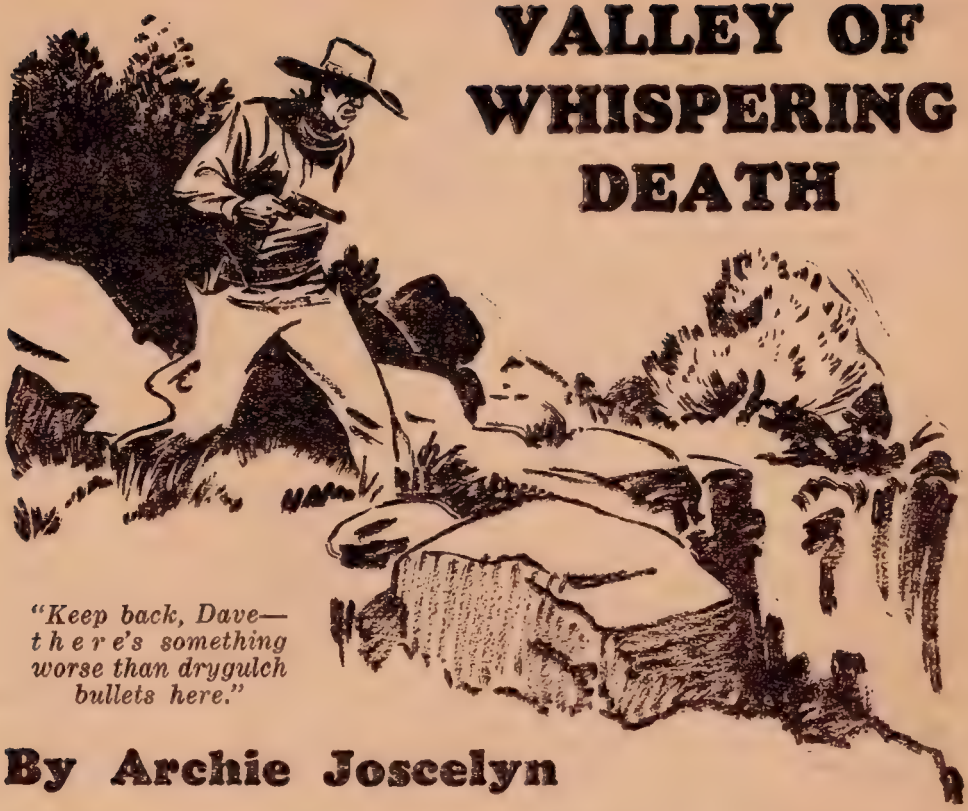
In the New October

GRIPPING DETECTIVE CASES

True accounts of famous crimes from hidden police files. Plus photographs!

NOW ON SALE

VALLEY OF WHISPERING DEATH



"Keep back, Dave—there's something worse than drygulch bullets here."

By Archie Joscelyn

BOTH horses snorted, which was nothing new. They had been suggesting that this was a spooky place for quite a while, acting skittish and uneasy. But this time there was something tangible for them to snort about, in the shape of a man, sprawled half on his face in the grass, and very completely dead.

Yank Tilton swung his long frame down from the saddle, with a brief nod to his riding mate, Dave Russell, and without words, Dave remained mounted, keen gaze sweeping the scattered, stunted evergreens, the brushy patches and broken arroyos here at the gateway to the valley—any of these shelters might sprout unpleasant death at any moment. And Yank himself, bending above the dead man, kept facing in the opposite direction, studiously alert as well.

He studied the bloated, blackened features of the dead man, sure proof that death had been of a grim and highly unpleasant nature. The unfortunate hombre's cartridge belt and gun had been taken from him. The less faded crease across his middle, where the belt had long been worn, was easy to see. The dead man himself was ordinary enough otherwise, in dress and appearance, to have been a wondering saddle tramp or a strayed desert rat, but there was no cayuse or burro anywhere about.

When they found the dead man—without marks of bullets or knives on him—Yank and Dave knew that something hellish lurked in this valley—then the little black arrows started falling around them. . . .

"What happened to him?" Dave asked, with one quick glance down at the swollen face. "Don't look like a bullet."

"Worse than a bullet," growled Yank. He was studying a small, purplish scratch on the brawny, bared right arm of the dead man. Now he stood up, rising catlike on the balls of his feet, gaze on a loose patch of good-sized rocks close at hand.

"We'll cover him with these," he said.

"Best we can do for the poor devil, right now. I don't feel like lingerin' long hereabouts."

"Which expresses my sentiments," Dave nodded, and increased his vigilant watch as Yank bent his six-feet-two of well-moulded bone and muscle to the task. Presently he straightened, moved a few feet to a gnarled and twisted fir, and stripped off a sizeable hunk of gum which had formed where thick sap had oozed from the bark and hardened. It was heavy, blackish, and not too savory looking, but he inserted a wad of it into his cheek with meditative satisfaction as he swung back into the saddle.

"Have a chew?" he asked hospitably.

Dave eyed it with disfavor and shook his head.

"Me, I can go for chawin' tobacker, up to and includin' snuff, which my maw always said was filthy, and I've wrapped my teeth around some other concoctions which didn't please my palate, but the looks of that stuff is a plenty."

"All the more for me," Yank agreed equably, and they rode for a while in silence, heading now between crowding, gaunt hills on either side. These had been pressing together, like the closing jaws of a bear trap, back where the dead man lain. Now they were widening out again, into a big valley, circled by high, almost impassable hills. The valley itself was dotted with smaller hills and rises, with one scarred and mighty butte rising like a gaunt spectre near the middle of it.

"You think that hombre might have been workin' with Pumice, by any chance?" Dave asked suddenly.

"I don't rightly figger that Pumice can be anywhere in this section of country," Yank said gloomily. "But it's an idea."

They rode again in silence, busy with none too pleasant thoughts. Pumice Peters was an old friend, a wandering, gun-handy cowboy, whom they knew was now busy somewhere on another angle of the same job which had brought them to this remote, death-cursed valley. Dave's suggestion, that he might have come here and be in trouble mixed with that dead man, wasn't encouraging, considering the manner in which the fellow had died. For the dead man might have been just a lonely wanderer, murdered out of hand, or he might have been riding with a man like Pumice.

THERE was scarcely any sound or warning of danger, but Yank, with the long instinct of the hunter often hunted, twitched his big body aside, at the same instant touching the cayuse with his spurs. Something which might have been a long-bodied insect, but wasn't, had hurtled silently out from a bunch of rocks and brush, and, missing his arm by a hair's-breadth as he jerked back, it came to a stop in the tangle of his horse's mane and hung quivering.

Gun in hand now, Yank looked back as he rode, but there was nothing to be seen. Presently he pulled to a stop, out in more open ground again, Dave following his example. But there were any number of trees and hiding places back there, and nothing else stirred in the hot, sultry air of mid-afternoon.

On ahead, it continued to be more open, and in the distance was the cool and welcome gleam of a small creek. Yank turned his horse toward this.

"We won't hunt for trouble, back there," he said, with a jerk of his head. "Too apt to find it—but nothin' we could lay our hands on."

"What was it?" Dave demanded.

For answer, Yank reached forward now and plucked the thing which had tangled in his horse's mane. He held it up gingerly, and both men eyed it appraisingly. It was an arrow—a little, wooden arrow, not much more than a foot long, rounded almost to the size of a lead pencil, with a sharp point, which had a stained, grayish-black look. There was no flint or metal to tip it, and as a weapon it looked like the epitome of the ineffectual.

"That's the queerest apology for an arrow I ever saw," Dave pronounced. "I don't know what Indian'd bother with such a toy."

"Maybe it looks like a toy, but I have an idea that it's about the deadliest arrow you ever saw—"

Yank stopped, thrusting the arrow carefully into a coat pocket. A big, fat porcupine had waddled unconcernedly into the path ahead of them, and was glancing up in vague surprise at sight of the horsemen. Left to his own devices, he would have moved on peacefully enough, but already Yank was unslinging the coiled lariat beside his saddle-horn. A moment later, with an easy flip of the wrist, he had the loop about the porky.

Surprised and angered that it should be taken so lightly, the porky humped into a ball and rattled its tail like a miniature sand-storm, in token of what it would do if given a chance. But it was helpless in the loop, as Yank dismounted. He approached within a few feet of it, being careful to keep where that tail full of needles could not reach to slap. Then, though the captive quill-pig strove to keep its tail toward him, he tossed the little arrow, lightly but expertly.

The needle-like point of it struck the porky on the nose and pricked through the skin. A drop of blood welled up as the arrow fell to the ground again, and for a moment the porcupine stared up at them stupidly. Then it gave a conclusive lurch, seemed to stiffen, and fell. As Yank shook his rope loose, it was dead.

Dave, watching with interest, whistled a soft bar or so of "Yankee Doodle"—proof that he was stirred.

"The stuff on it looks about like that gum you're chewin'," he commented. "But I reckon you wasn't stretchin' the truth none, when you said it was deadly. I've seen some quick results, but next to a bullet, nothin' that could hold a candle to that."

"THAT'S what happened to our friend, back there at the entrance to the valley," Yank said grimly. "And I have a hunch that he was left there for us to find—as sort of a reminder of what this valley is like."

"And now we're in it, you being of a stubborn disposition, and they use you for a target." Dave's eyes quested uneasily, more intent than ever. "Yank, you and me've been in a good many spots where I didn't just enjoy some parts of the picture, but this sort of thing kind of gives me the creeps, and not the kind a baby has. Besides which, I never yet knew an Indian that was so danged quiet. Usual, when they let off an arrow or something, they can't resist a yell along with it."

"There's a lot that's queer about this valley, and no mistake," Yank agreed soberly, and glanced at the descending ball of the sun. It was bad enough in broad daylight, but the thought of being surrounded by such adversaries in the night was worse. Then he shrugged.

"It all seems to shape up that we're finally gettin' close on the trail of Juan Sylvester, and we'd be fools to be bluffed out now," he said.

"We would that," Dave agreed quietly. "Which is what that lobo would like. Though maybe we'll be fools and be snuffed out instead, which would suit him even better. But here's a drink anyway."

They had reached the creek, which flowed here with a sandy beach on one side, though willows lined the opposite bank, with rank growths of grass and weeds both above and below them—shelter where death might be lurking, but they had to have water, and this was as good a place as any to be found.

The horses drank thirstily. Dave and Yank, dismounted, took turns while the other kept watch. Yank had brought along the arrow, and now he stepped to a dank spot beside the stream and cut off a tall-growing stalk or so of mandrake. Slicing off a length of it between joints, something more than a foot apart, he slipped the arrow into this hollow sheath and placed it in his pocket again.

"What I wish is that there was somethin' we could see," Dave complained. "Aside from a dead man, and an arrow, there ain't a danged thing you can set yore teeth in—"

"Then, my friends, you shall be gratified in that desire!" A voice, cool, a little sardonic, spoke from the thicket just across the creek, though there was nothing to be seen. "Put up your guns," it went on. "Guns are useless toys when the whispering death is all around you. And make no mistake, my friends, it is all around you. Did I but say the word, you would die, so fast—pouf! Say which side one arrow shall come from, to fall right beside you, and be convinced!"

The two partners hesitated, fists still gripping their guns, striving to see something. But there was only the greenery of the lush grass and weeds beside the creek, the clumps of brush, and the uneasy chuckling of the water. Remembering the dead man, and the swift death of the quill pig, Yank nodded.

"Let's have a demonstration, from off at the left there," he suggested. "If it's a good one, we'll talk turkey."

"If it was a good one, my friends, you would be meat for the turkey buzzards." The voice held an ugly note behind the laughter in it. "But as you say—watch!"

Something fell at their feet, coming

from off to the left. Another of those little arrows with the stained and blackened tip. Yank eyed it grimly.

"You win," he acknowledged. "What do we do with our guns? Or, as friends, do we keep them?"

"Because we are friends, it is perhaps safer that you do not keep them, just to avoid any trouble," the voice purred. "Toss them on the ground, over this way. So. That is good. I like to see such trust. It is so helpful, but yes."

Out from the dense growth of weeds and brush stepped a man, who paused to pick up the guns as he came. He was not a big man, standing half a head shorter than either Yank or Dave, and he was slight in build, of an indefinite age, with yellowish-sandy hair and no beard. He had all the look of a sanctimonious deacon about to pass the plate, except for his eyes. Lustrous, deeply black, there was in them a coldness, a mocking deviltry which was not easy to mistake.

"And now, so that you can see how it was—the little messengers of death," he nodded. And at some unseen signal, six figures glided out from their hiding places and were all around them—figures which might almost have stepped out of a nightmare. They were ordinary enough at first sight—Indians, scantily clad, each one holding a tiny bow and a small quiver of those little arrows.

IT WAS the silence of them, as they stood like a pack of hounds, and something in their attitude, which made them seem terrible. They waited, then the little man waved a hand carelessly.

"Supper," he ordered. "And then, a little refreshment. Tonight, my good ones, we begin to celebrate."

Dave had an uneasy moment of wondering just what it was that they planned to celebrate. But instantly the strange six were active. From hiding places they brought food, tin cups and dishes, and without delay a fire was started and a meal being cooked. Their strange host nodded and strolled across to join them.

"You are wondering about a lot of things," he said affably. "So I will be pleased to explain. But first I will tell you who you are, and what you are here for, braving the dangers of this Valley of the Whispering Death. You are Yank Tilton and Dave Russell, detectives for the Cattleman's Association, and you have come here on the trail of Juan Sylvester, man of mystery, and a shrewd and unscrupulous thief. This Juan, he has stolen cattle from many men, but mostly his methods are more subtle than rustling, and better paying—such things as tampering with brands at the registrar's office, or forging a bill of sale for a whole train load of cattle after they have been shipped—little things such as that. And being clever, he has gotten away, as the saying is, with murder."

"He has that," Yank agreed. "Literally and otherwise."

Their host spread his hands and smiled.

"But exactly. And he has become such a nuisance to so many that finally he nears the end of his rope, it would seem, when Yank Tilton and Dave Russell take his trail and chase him to this, his own Valley of the Whispering Death. Which death you have seen demonstrated."

"You seem to know a lot about him, and his valley?" Yank suggested.

Again the spread of fluttering hands and that corrosive smile.

"But who should know better, my friends? For I am Geary Wood, of whom no doubt you will have heard, and no man has suffered more at the hands of this so evil Juan. With the tale of my own wrongs at his hands, I will not weary you. Enough that I have had the brushes, as you say it, with him through the years, this man who once was neighbor to me, and who looks so much like me that more than once I have been arrested in his place. Once I came so close to being lynched, with my own rope, before they discovered their mistake." He sighed wistfully.

"So I have, perhaps, come to know more of this Juan than do most men. Because of this likeness between us, he has been my evil shadow. And for existence itself, I have had to fight against him, though by nature I am a peaceful man. I, too, have followed him this far, have come determined on settling this thing once and for all. And due to me, you are alive today, where otherwise you would be like the man whom you found."

"How do you mean?" Dave demanded. "If these fellows work for you—"

"That, my friends, is the exact point. They have not always worked for me. Oh no. These are the tongueless men of Juan Sylvester. You have heard of them?"

"Tongueless men?" Dave echoed, and shot a quick glance at the silent figures so busily at work around them. Yank felt a chill in his blood, but nodded.

"I've heard rumors," he confessed.

"But exactly, my friends. Rumors. And who has heard more than that, of this man of mystery? No one, I venture to say, save myself, and I—I have perhaps had the greater opportunities thrust upon me. For many years, this Juan has done a great deal of mischief, through the agency of these silent men. He won a hold over them, and to make sure that they betrayed no secrets, he cut their tongues out. A careful villain, this Juan Sylvester. One who ruled by fear of terrible powers. And for weapons, as silent as themselves, he gave them the little arrows."

"What sort of a poison does he use on them?" Yank asked.

"A special poison, of course, and, as you have observed, one very swift and deadly. One scratch from these little arrows, and there is no cure. The basis of it is rattlesnake poison. I have heard how it is prepared, somewhat after the manner of the Indians who used to be so adept at that sort of thing."

HE SMILED, and seated himself cross-legged upon the sand.

"Many rattlesnakes are captured and placed in a pit. Then a chunk of raw meat is thrust against them, while they are stirred and kept angry. They strike it, times without number, until it is, as we say, saturated and adrip with the venom from their fangs. Then the meat is allowed to lie in the sun, to rot and fester, and some other poisons are added to the mixture. When an arrow is dipped in the final concentrate, and dried—" he shrugged.

"Nice thing," Dave Russell agreed drily.

"Oh, but very nice. And I have come here after this Juan Sylvester. I have won his Indians away from him, to work for me and against him. They have worked for him through fear, but their hatred has been great. So I have managed to save my life, and yours. And I suggest that now we shall all work together to capture this evil one. Or kill him as may be necessary. He is here in the valley, a hunted creature at last in the place where he has always sought refuge in time of trouble. But he is still wily, still dangerous. Yet this time his trail grows short. Tomorrow, I think, it ends."

"Ought to be about time," Dave growled.

"Exactly, my friends. And now, enough of unpleasant subjects. Let us eat. After that, since you are safe, we celebrate. A little drink, made of the mescal. Not often can these creatures be allowed to have it, but tonight is an occasion. More especially as we want them to overcome their fear of their old master. One drink for them, one only, of course. But as many as we like for ourselves."

The food was good. They ate heartily, Yank sprawling, apparently as much at ease as if by a fire with a ring of friendly cowboys around him. Geary Wood, as he called himself, and the name seemed as strange as anything about him, departed to get the mescal, and for a few minutes they were alone, the watchful tongueless men crouching off at some distance, like a pack of hounds. Dave's face was troubled.

"How much of this is true, Yank?" he demanded. "Of course, I've heard about this Wood, and how he's been mistaken for Juan Sylvester, more than once. His story fits well enough, but everything leaves me feeling that we're in a bad spot, somehow."

"I sort of have the same hunch," Yank confessed, "But at least we're alive, which is something. Wood wants us alive, at least for the present, and that's a break for us. Maybe the only one we'll get. So we'd better watch our step, string along with him, and be ready for anything."

Their host was returning now, with a big skin jug which the Indians eyed eagerly. The sun had set, a little crimson light still lingered to mark the place of its departure, but mostly there were only the glowing embers of the fire, ringed by the closing night, creeping in a black wall to surround them. Wood seemed almost to purr.

"Just a taste, for these fellows," he said, and spoke to the tongueless men in some dialect. "It's very strong stuff," he added, "for men with red skins." He poured hardly more than a swallow apiece into their tin cups. They drained them at a gulp and looked on like dogs which have been thrown a scrap of mean and hope for more, but without expecting to get. Yet the avid hunger in their eyes remained, even while they dropped the empty cups on the ground.

"No more tonight," Wood assured them, and spoke again in the dialect, sharply. "Tomorrow, after the work is done—there will be all that they can drink then, as a

reward. Now, my friends, you and I will drink."

YANK MOVED a little in the now dense gloom, one foot touching the pile of empty cups. His fingers, in his coat pocket, fumbled with the hollow length of mandrake and the arrow which it enclosed. That was a weapon which had not been taken from them, and suddenly he saw a new possibility of using it. Casually, for the evening was growing chilly with the going down of the sun, he buttoned his coat.

Wood had filled three cups almost to the brim, and now he passed them with a courtly bow. Only his eyes, in the growing dark, seemed to glow like those of a mountain cat.

"It is a strong drink, my friends," he assured them. "But you will find it most mellow and soothing. You will sleep soundly, but you will awaken with no ill effects, I can assure you. And tomorrow we will work together!"

He sipped at his own drink, and Yank, who had shifted his position a little farther from the fire-light, tasted his liquor. It was, as Wood said, mellow and soothing, but even the taste was enough to assure him that it was potent. He saw that Dave, drinking a little, was taking advantage of every opportunity to spill out some in the dark, but Wood drank and seemed untroubled.

"White men can drink two or three cups," he said. "An Indian goes to sleep like a log with half a cup. Allow me to fill for you again, gentlemen."

Yank accepted a second cup. Dave was in the middle of his second as well, when the liquor slopped from it, and as he sank back he was snoring.

"He never could hold his liquor," Yank nodded, and marveled at the potency of the drink. For Dave had drank not more than half a cup in all, he was sure. "It seems to have a kick like White Mule."

"A White Mule, my friend, is a mild creature compared to this," Wood assured him. "This has a kick like a whole team of mules. But you and I, we enjoy it, yes? Another cup?"

"Don't mind if I do," Yank agreed, and hid a grin in the darkness. He took it, sipped, then sank back himself, and now, he saw, even the hardened drinker had felt its effects. Wood, too, was snoring heavily.

But even in a drunken sleep, his caution remained with him. He had hidden the guns somewhere, and as he went to sleep, he had leaned across the still well-filled wine skin, clutching it to him. The Indians, still lurking watchfully in the shadows, eyed it eagerly, but made no move to try and reach it. They knew that, even in such a sleep, Geary Wood would arouse instantly if the skin was touched.

"A pity they should have to go thirsty, though," Yank nodded slowly. "Special when they'll wake up all right, after sleepin' right sound."

As their host had promised, morning brought no ill-effects from the drink. Yank felt good, and Dave was clear-headed, but a little sheepish at the way he had gone under.

"And I didn't drink hardly any of the stuff," he assured Yank. "I aimed to outlast him—but it didn't work that way."

"Maybe he didn't aim that it should," Yank said dryly.

With breakfast out of the way, the hunt for Juan Sylvester was started. There were a number of puzzling things about this setup, here in this valley of death, which the C. A. men didn't quite understand, but there could be no doubt of the grimness of Wood's purpose in this hunt. Moreover, it was plain enough from the start that the tongueless men were keeping a watchful eye on them as well, with the packs of deadly arrows ever at the ready. Evidently they didn't trust them much more than Dave trusted them in turn. And even with a gun, he figured; a man wouldn't have much chance against those arrows.

FOR A COUPLE of hours they ranged the valley, the Indians like great, silent hounds on a cold trail, and then all at once it grew warm. They had picked up the fresh trail, and now it was a hunt to the death. Yet it was obvious that, with all the help he had, that Wood was afraid of this other man.

He had handed their guns back to Dave and Yank that morning, with a smile.

"Now that distrust is removed," he explained. "For today you may need them. This Juan Sylvester, he is a desperate character. But today we remove him as a menace, yes?"

"And I've sort of an unchancy feelin' that, soon as we do get the poor devil, they'll aim to do a good, all-around job, and that there'll be arrows comin' at us,

pronto, from about seven directions," Dave confided to Yank, as opportunity offered. "And I don't like those odds—not any."

Yank had much the same uneasy feeling. But now the tongueless men had finally flushed their quarry, and he was taking cover in the only place, with such death creeping on him from all directions—climbing the great butte which rose so like a spectre of death in the middle of the valley.

The rugged sides of it offered a lot of opportunities for cover, but now, as their quarry was being driven higher and higher by the relentless chase of nine men, he was being forced to a point where eventually he must be cornered. And yet he was not shooting back!

"We've had brushes with him before, the last couple of days," Wood explained, and there was an eager, exultant throb to his voice now. "He's killed five of the Indians in two days, before they could get him—he has the devil's own luck!—but I guess he has used nearly all his shells, and is keeping the few which remain for close range. This time, they won't do him any good!"

There could be little doubt of the eventual cornering of their victim, Yank saw. Despite the amazing fight which he had put up against overwhelming odds, since his own henchmen had turned against him, Juan Sylvester appeared to be near the end of his trail. He was plainly short of ammunition, and the little arrows, while deadly enough on a two-way trail, were apparently running out as well.

All at once something whizzed and crashed—a rock, thrown from up above, landing with a dull smash on a thick skull and crushing it like an eggshell. One of the Indians toppled outward and back, poised for a moment at the brink of a precipice, and plunged over.

"He is a devil," Wood panted. "A devil, I tell you! But we get him!"

Yank's jaw clamped hard. He caught just a glimpse of the hunted man, as he retreated still higher up the hill, following that sudden attack with the rock. Sylvester was climbing desperately now, yet he seemed to scramble on all fours, and one leg dragged, all but useless.

"I got him in the foot with a bullet, a couple of days ago," Wood explained. "I can see that now. And I killed his horse. While the Indians got his partner. So he has not been able to get away, but what a fighting man he is!"

"Just the same, he's gettin' trapped this time," Dave muttered, and his voice, at Yank's ear, was low but urgent. "I've just made a discovery. They didn't give us back our cartridges and these in the guns ain't no good. There's lead stuck back in 'em, but they've been fired before. Which means no powder."

"I found that out, quite a spell ago," Yank said calmly.

Dave stared, sudden cold sweat beading his face. Higher up the hill, the fugitive had showed again for a moment. Forced to keep climbing, he had clutched at a bush, and it broke in his grasp now, allowing him to slip and fall for a few feet. Now he was at the foot of a rocky ledge, pitilessly exposed for all to see, yards from cover.

And this man was not the famed Juan Sylvester. He couldn't be, for he was their old friend and fellow law-man, Pumice Peters.

Some of this nightmarish thing was becoming dreadfully clear to Dave now. That slain partner whom Wood had referred to—the man they had found with the arrow-mark on him the day before. He had been siding Peters, of course. Which meant, as Dave had uneasily suspected from the start, that Geary Wood was no friend to them!

FRIGHTENED of Peters, who had succeeded in killing five of the tongueless men, Wood had tricked them into joining in the hunt, secretly gaining a sardonic amusement at his jest, being certain that they would meet the same fate as Peters, once he was out of the way. And Wood and his Indians were armed to the teeth with those deadly arrows of whispering death, while Dave and Yank had only guns which were useless in their hands!

Even Peters was disarmed at last, for he had dropped his gun as he fell, and it was still bounding and tumbling below.

Wood had thrown off the cloak now. He emitted a hoarse cackle of triumph as he saw the plight of Pumice. And now, too, the Indians, who had skulked back in a healthy fear, had popped out as if by magic from their several coverts, the little arrows were speeding like winged death, straight up at the helpless law man, coming from all sides.

Dave, his face white under its tan, was jerking at his own gun, with some wild notion of at least throwing it, panting. He

stared as Yank knocked his arm down.

"But it's Pumice!" he gasped. "And they'll kill him—"

"We can't help him—that way," Yank cautioned sharply. "Watch!"

Every man, it seemed, was watching then, somehow spellbound and fascinated. The five silent Indians, and Pumice Peters, as well, even Wood. All watching with incredulity as Peters pulled himself to his feet.

At least four of that shower of arrows had sped true, had pricked the face or neck or hands of Peters. Spots of blood had appeared where three of when had fallen away again, and Peters was jerking the other out, throwing it down.

Fear was on his face—the honest terror of a man who has seen what dreadful death lurks in such a guise. Yet as the moments passed and he stood there, some of the fear was vanishing, surprise taking its place.

The same surprise and unbelief was in the faces of the Indians, of Wood. Suddenly he shouted.

"Shoot him, you fools. Use your guns—oh, the devil, I forgot—"

He was starting to jerk at a hidden gun himself—a short-barreled, evil Derringer. But as it came into the light, Yank Tilton moved, and a little bow was bent, an arrow quivering to be released.

"Drop that gun, Sylvester" he snapped. "The game's up. This arrow will kill!"

Wood, or Juan Sylvester, stared, his face going the color of old putty, then the gun slipped from nerveless fingers, while his hunted glance shifted back up again to where Peters stood, as untroubled now as ever, watching with fresh interest as he recognized Dave and Yank.

But it was the Indians whom Dave was watching now. They, too, had stared in a dreadful expectancy, a growing uncertainty. But as it became clear to them that, somehow, their little arrows had failed, that death had gone out of them, and that Juan Sylvester was unarmed and afraid, a change had come over them—a change swift and terrible as the death they had carried.

SUDDENLY, with snarling grunts, the more horrible because they came from mouths which could not speak, the pack was upon Juan Sylvester, and now the ancient, binding fear was gone, the unleashed hatred of years expending itself. There was one shriek from the doomed man, cut short off, as the whole five tore at him. Yank turned his head away as Peters limped down.

"I don't know just how it happened," he confessed. "I sure thought my number was up. But it suits me pretty well the way it's worked out."

"I did the best I could," Peters confessed modestly. "'Specially after they got me trapped and I couldn't get out of this cussed valley again. I took an arrow they missed me with and got one of them in turn, which worried them, and my gun worked good till I ran out of shells. If they'd known that, they could have finished me off yesterday. For I was too bad off to travel any more, right then."

Their vengeance wreaked on the man they had feared and hated for so long, the remaining Indians were slipping away into the coverts, silent as questing wolves, but no longer dangerous. Dave shook his head and stared.

"You knew he was Sylvester, and you knew what was coming," he charged Yank. "So you had a finger in it. But how the blazes did you work it?"

"I had a strong hunch that he was Sylvester, and worked on that theory, so as to be on the safe side," Yank agreed. "If he turned out to be the man he claimed he was, I didn't figure it would do any serious harm; and when he showed his hand, I knew who he was. Working it wasn't hard. I knew the tongueless men would turn on him if he ever failed. So, last night, I saved my liquor—"

"How could you do that?"

"It wasn't so hard in the dark. Those tin cups that the Indians had left were right handy, waiting to be filled, and so I just used that hollow length of mandrake stem, that I'd been keeping the arrow sheathed in. Putting it under my coat and up to my chin, I contrived to run it down to the cups, under my coat, and get a half-cup for each Indian, which was plenty. And when I let them see it, after he was asleep, that was all they wanted to know. After they'd drank it and were dead to the world, I took their arrows, whittled off the poison tips and whittled fresh points on them, then stained them again—all except one that I kept for emergencies—"

"What did you stain them with? It looked the same old stuff on them."

"Just smeared them with some of my gum, that you pointed out looked so much like that poison," Yank grinned. "I'd chewed the flavor all out, anyway."

BOOTHILL BONANZAS

A True Fact Article

By Kenneth P. Wood

WHEN AN old-time desert rat or prospector guardedly opens his buckskin poke and cautiously displays several good-sized nuggets of gold, he will very likely explain that they were gleaned from some far-flung claim, long since dead, that was once a bonanza lode. If encouraged he will commence to narrate its history which will be one of the numerous well-authenticated yarns of lost mines, tales of many years ago which persist to this day throughout the gold-producing country.

The Breyfogle, for example, is a popular subject among the miners of the Southwest. Tom Breyfogle, so the story runs, came into one of the desert towns with a bag of gold quartz which was thickly speckled with "color." Richer it was than anything ever seen in that rich mining community. Later he started back to where he said he had found the pay dirt, but was never seen again. Breyfogle was an old man, and some years later a friend of his admitted that the old prospector had confessed to him that the poke of rich quartz had been found in the hand of a dead man far out on the desert—so the origin of the mine was lost.

This suggests a similar mystery of eastern Arizona—the Black Burro Mine, which received its name from the finding of a strayed jackass carrying a new pack-saddle on which were lashed several rawhide bags full of gold ore of incredible richness, but bearing no name or other identification as to the owner. That was nearly seventy-five years ago, but no gold mine of any consequence has ever been discovered within a hundred miles of the spot where the burro was found. It was near the border of New Mexico, on the Mansfield Trail, which runs from the San Francisco River to the headwaters of Eagle Creek. At that time the region was a hotbed of blood-thirsty Apaches and white renegades.

According to mining camp lore, the ever-raiding Apaches were responsible for numerous lost mines, for they killed many a prospector in his diggings or on some remote trail, and the secrets of the murdered men died with them. Old man Mansfield, after whom the big trail is named, himself fell a victim to the Indians. He had a mine of undisputed richness which he worked for a time, and lived in a dugout adjoining it. His saddle failed him one day and he rode into Clifton bareback to buy a new cinch and some buckles. On his return trip the Apaches ambushed him, and for years afterward fortune-hunters through that section searched for a dugout containing a broken saddle as a guide to Mansfield's mine, but it was never found.

The Breyfogle and its twin lost mine, the Gunsight, are in the Death Valley region of California. There is a belief out there among the free-lance gold-seekers that the rich claims found at Randsburg, in Kern County, fifteen years later, were actually a relocation of one or the other, or perhaps both, of those famous lost claims.

There is no doubt but some of these lost mines have been rediscovered. For, in 1898, Isaac Fowler, a Brooklyn man, while hunting in Chihuahua, Mexico, with a former

Inspector of Texas Rangers named Bill Singleton, found an old tunnel, the mouth of which had been walled up at some remote period. There was the usual local tradition of a lost mine that had been worked by the Spaniards early in the century, and which had been abandoned by them in consequence of the hostility of the warring Apaches.

There did happen to have been a mine known as La Tiopa, trace of which had been lost, and the discoverers of the walled-up tunnel decided this was it. The mine is now a paying one, but it is hardly the Arabian Nights' dream of tunnel walls alight with gold, and ore so rich that a bishop's punch-bowl was hammered from a single lump. For so tradition describes La Tiopa in the old Spanish days, but those were the times of exaggerated speculation.

A still richer find, however, was that of a prospector on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River near Fort Hancock, Texas. An old mining dump had been there so long that nobody knew who had taken out the rock. This prospector made an assay of the remaining deposit, and found it moderately rich. He interested capitalists, and they reopened the old workings. The practical miners, though satisfied with what they were making, determined from the pitch of the vein and other indications that the mine could be worked with greater profit by tunneling further down the mountainside.

When they cleared the face of the hill for a tunnel, they were astonished to find a solid wall of masonry, laid in cement, and so hard that they had to blast it open with dynamite. Once through the wall, another tunnel was revealed, entrance to which was barred by a massive door of hardwood logs fastened by a huge antique lock of Spanish workmanship. This was also broken down, and the miners discovered that the tunnel ran about five hundred feet back to a breast of ore many times richer than the pay rock in which they had been working above, most of which was only the "dump" from the lower excavation.

THE miners of a century and a half ago, whoever they were, had as good judgment as the late comers as to the best place to run a tunnel into that formation. A revolution or Indian uprising had probably caused the abandonment of the mine and the workers, probably Spaniards, with the characteristic subtlety of their time, had hidden the bonanza lode, leaving exposed what under the crude processes of the last century was a comparatively worthless and deserted mine.

No doubt the longest lost of all these lodes that have set men crazy was located by no less famous a personage than Kit Carson, the hero of more frontier yarns than any of the great army of adventurous pioneers. About eighty years ago Kit Carson, Jim Kinney, and a half-breed Indian brought to Fort Randall, in what is now South Dakota, a bag full of shining nuggets, which they said were found on Cabin Creek. They told a circumstantial story of the find, describing a very wealthy deposit. But the place was in the heart of the Indian country, and the Cheyenne and the Sioux were both on the warpath at the time. However, this did not prevent hundreds of eager gold-seekers from going out to search for the great prospect, and nearly all of them were butchered and scalped by the redskins.

Unfortunately, whatever other pretentions the famous scout and guide had to greatness, a reputation for truth telling was not among them. Kit Carson never tried to find the mine again himself, nor did his partner Kinney, though both drank up or gambled away their bag of nuggets within a week's time. Nevertheless the Lost Cabin Mine was the object of many a long and weary hunt, for Carson and Kinney frequently repeated their story wherever they went, and even drew maps to guide the credulous who cared to look for more of the precious yellow nuggets.

Oregon, too, has its lost lodes, and a popular story attaches to the Crazy Dutchman Mine, near the head of the Iroquois River. For many years a little old man, forlorn and ghost-like, haunted the hills of that locality for his lost treasure-trove. He would always threaten with a rifle, the few strangers who happened to come into the vicinity, then slink off into the woods. He spied on every camp that located near the river, following the campers about like a shadow.

Many years before, this frightened ghost of the Chetco Hills was a young German, who, with a companion, came into the region gold hunting. They found a great prospect and began to develop it, when a band of marauding Indians surprised them at their work. The German's partner was killed during the melee that ensued, but the German himself managed to escape and

make his way to Rogue River, hugging some bits of gold-bearing quartz. After working hard for many years he finally saved enough money to return to the claim which he proposed to work alone.

Of course he never found the lode again. At last his money being exhausted, he was compelled to tell of his lost mine, and showed specimens that he had jealously guarded for years. Long ago prospectors and treasure-seekers of that locality tired of looking for what they popularly dubbed the Crazy Dutchman Mine, but the little old man never gave up. For the remainder of his life he moved feebly about those hills in a state of terror lest anybody should find the deposit before he did.

The list of these phantom claims is interminable. Their stories bear a certain family resemblance, but each one has an individuality, some feature that makes it interesting apart from the others. For instance, there is the Lee Mine, long a mystery of the California foothills. But the Lee was a real mine, not merely a deposit or reef seen once and then lost. The Lee's location is on file among the archives of San Bernardino County, its whereabouts described generally, as was the custom of the time in the absence of a survey. But so far as known it has never been rediscovered.

A little more than sixty years ago, a miner named Jim Lee located the claim. He hired an assistant to help him, built a windlass, and sunk a shaft. He also built a little cabin near the mine, and adjoining it he put up an arrastre to reduce his quartz. At intervals he came into San Bernardino to sell the dust and to purchase provisions, powder, and tools.

From all indications it was a pretty good little mine, for at various times, capitalists, notably the former Governor Waterman, considered buying it. Lee was not anxious to sell, however. The locality was remote and difficult of access, and negotiations never went so far as to make a visit to the mine necessary. Then disaster befell the owner.

ONE day Lee came to town as usual to purchase supplies, and mentioned that he had to hurry back, as his helper was almost entirely out of food. The next morning he was found dead on the outskirts of San Bernardino, a bullet in his heart. The body had not been robbed, and there was nothing to indicate who had murdered him or why it was done. Realizing the plight of the assistant left at the mine without provisions, the public administrator and a party started out immediately with supplies for the mine. But they failed to find the shaft, arrastre, windlass, or cabin, and nothing was ever heard of the miner Lee had left there. He could scarcely have come away without a grubstake, for that was not a country where men could find food along the road like today—and that is all that has ever been heard about the Lee Mine, although it has been eagerly sought countless times.

Another legend of lost fortune, which is still being looked for, is the Lost Dutch Oven Mine, consisting of a huge pot of gold, not the proverbial one, but a Dutch oven full of the valuable stuff. It is awaiting a lucky finder somewhere in a hidden gulch south of the Clipper Mountains of Southern California, only two hundred and fifty miles from the city of Los Angeles. This pot of pay dirt was found and then lost again in the spring of 1894 by Tom Scofield, a mining engineer, who was sent by the officials of the Santa Fe Railroad to locate water for the company in the desert country surrounding the Clipper Mountains.

During his wanderings among the hills, the engineer chanced upon a hidden gulch and a narrow trail which led from it to an abandoned mining camp, the owner of which, from all indications, had been absent for some years. The camp, or rather what remained of it, consisted of the fragments of a time-worn tent, a broken-down and weather-beaten cot, and a few rusty prospecting tools. Near-by, half buried in the earth, was an old-fashioned Dutch oven —a huge iron pot with a lid—which was also rusted beyond redemption.

A further survey of the vicinity disclosed a large prospect hole to the rear of the camp which seemed to run into the earth for a considerable distance. Naturally Scofield let himself down the shaft to inspect the diggings and the wealth at his fingertips almost staggered him. He thrilled at the richness of the ore which appeared on the very surface of the auriferous quartz in not only one vein, but a number of veins of pure gold. After chipping off a few samples of the quartz he clambered to the surface again, and endeavored to uncover some clue that might lead to the identity of the original claimant.

Nothing in the way of a clue could be

found; then, chancing to remove the lid of the old Dutch oven, he experienced a second thrill. For the rusty old pot-like oven was nearly filled to the brim with shining lumps of virgin gold—gold of the same type and pureness that he had taken from the shaft.

The lucky engineer rubbed his hands together greedily. He was rich. He even tried to lift the big pot to see whether or not he could carry it away with him, but it was impossible to even move it. So he hastily filled all his pockets with handsful of the precious metal and literally ran back to his own camp from whence he set out immediately for Los Angeles. Scofield's third thrill was delivered in the form of an assayer's certificate covering the specimens from the shaft, which showed a return of several thousand dollars in gold to the ton.

The engineer confided his phenomenal luck to a close friend, and as soon as the heavy rains had ceased, started with his confidant and two pack animals to claim the fortune that awaited him in the hidden gulch. But in his hasty flight from the mine, Scofield failed to make mental or written notes of the character of the surrounding country, or the landmarks in the hidden gulch, hence, the cached pot of gold and the shaft were never again located. The two men scoured the countryside for weeks, but without success. The gold-filled gulch completely eluded them. Later, when the secret was divulged to the world in general, a number of fortune-hunters combed the hills around the Clipper Mountains for the Lost Dutch Oven Mine, but it could not be found, and it remains lost to the present day.

One of the prettiest of these famous stories of lost wealth is that of Lingard's Lake, which is an article of faith in all the old placer country between the head of the Feather River and the Yuba, in northern California. In the fall of 1853 there came to Nelsonpoint, a mining camp on Feather River, at the mouth of Hopkins Creek, Francis Lingard, a prospector. At the store and roadside tavern of John Carrington he had a hearty meal, and purchased a bill of supplies, paying for them in raw gold, according to the custom of the time. But instead of the usual dust, Lingard tendered a nugget worth about a hundred dollars, and displayed several more of the same kind.

DURING the next two or three months the prospector several times came in for supplies and paid for them with big nuggets. Each visit to the camp showed him more worried and depressed over something, but he took none into his confidence until late in November, when he came in broke. Finally Lingard told the storekeeper his story, and offered, in consideration of a grubstake, a share in his chance for fabulous wealth.

The prospector explained that a year before he had been gold hunting in the high Sierras, and, getting short of provisions, he struck across country toward the camps on the Feather River. There had been a great drought, and there was little water in the hills. One hot afternoon, when he had been without water for twenty-four hours, he spied a large lake a long way off. In scrambling down to the water's edge he came to a little creek which cascaded over a rocky ledge and then ran through a pebbly channel into the lake. He slid to the foot of the waterfall to slake his thirst, and as he stooped, he immediately recoiled in amazement, for the pebbly runway was dotted with glistening nuggets. Fully half of the pebbles, he said, were pure gold.

Not daring to leave the spot, he slept beside his riches that night. Next morning he gathered from the shining trail that led from the foot of the fall into the lake, a distance of twenty feet, all the nuggets he could possibly carry, and started for Nelsonpoint, the nearest camp he knew. After traveling a few miles through rough country, he found he had overestimated his strength, and made a cache of most of his lumps of gold at the foot of a big sugar pine tree that was on a direct line between a prominent cliff and a point of the golden lake. Then he went on to Nelsonpoint and made his purchases.

While staying in camp the drought broke. The sky opened, and it rained as it rains only in the California mountains at the beginning of the wet season. When Lingard went forth again, he failed to find the waterfall that dropped into a bed of sparkling gold. He found a lake which he thought was the right one, and made his way clear around it, but nowhere along the shore did a creek empty into it over a channel floored with nuggets.

He tried to get the line from the hill, but the cliff eluded him, the bold projection he had made his landmark could only be noted

from a particular place, so his store of nuggets at the roots of the sugar pine was also lost, like its parent treasure-place. He hunted for a year, spending his nuggets one after another for supplies, until all were gone. Then he came to the camp and told his sad story to the storekeeper.

Carrington being thoroughly convinced, fitted out the prospector, and he returned to the search. As before, he kept it up until the winter drove him from the mountains. Then the storekeeper laid the matter before a number of his friends, and they resolved on a systematic search for Lingard's Lake. Carrington and Lingard, with Jim Beckwith, the discoverer of Beckwith's Pass through the Sierras; Joe Cooper, the Indian fighter; Net Brown and Frank Wheeler, all well-trained prospectors and frontiersmen, districted the territory between the two rivers and combed it over time and again, but found no trace of the gold. They account for this by the rise of the lakes after the long dry spell. Lingard's treasure-trove, they said, was revealed only when the lake was extremely low.

This is the reason why men of Plumas County still haunt the shores of the mountain lakes in times of drought, and grub about the roots of every big sugar pine they pass. Lingard kept up the hunt for twenty years, whenever he had enough money to keep him in provisions for a time. They never do give up a search like this....

A Brand New $2.00 Novel

You'll Find Double Entertainment in

ANSON PIPER'S
Swift-Moving Novel

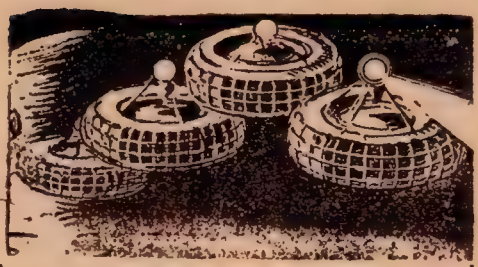
"DOUBLE TRAIL"

READ

REAL WESTERN

OCTOBER

NOW ON SALE!



Today we must fight to win the world for the four freedoms —

But let's not forget to dream of tomorrow!

FUTURE FANTASY
and
SCIENCE FICTION

offers you the very best in today's imaginative literature — the dreams which will be the commonplace realities of tomorrow!

Watch for the new October issue of this magazine. It features

"The Extrapolated Dimwit"

a novelette which will take you out beyond the farthest stars in a madcap search for a missing screwball scientist. It's by one of the new leaders in the field.

S. D. GOTTESMAN

Also

Martin Pearson,
Hugh Raymond,
J. S. Klimaris,
Millard Verne Gordon,
Damon Knight,

and others

15c on all stands

MEDICO'S BAD MEDICINE

By Cliff Campbell

As the town doctor, it was Clint Harbison's duty to see to it that the wounded owlhoot lived long enough to talk. But there were reasons why it would be to Clint's advantage if the man died under the knife—not least of which was the gun trained on Harbison's back as he worked!

SIX-GUN fire, of late, had a way of jangling Clint Harbison's nerves, even if a medico was supposed to have no nerves. Tonight was no exception. Twin streaks of flame pierced the moon-tinted darkness under the big cottonwoods across the street, and the crash of the guns punctuated the opening of a door over there—that of the bank. Half in shadow, a tall figure staggered out, clutching a heavy sack, hesitated a moment, then dashed around the corner and was gone, with the muffled pound of hoofbeats echoing back.

It all happened as quickly as that, leaving Clint Harbison white and shaken. Not because a bank had been robbed and a man killed, with another one badly shot up and close to death. Such things, in Pawnee, had become dreadfully commonplace of late. But because the doctor had recognized the man who ran from the bank, carrying that sack of loot, and who seemed to be making good his escape. The man had been Skeets Harbison—and Skeets was his brother.

The confusion, resultant upon the robbery, didn't mean anything to Clint, in the minutes which followed, while details were being discovered and discussed. He was used to turmoil. Only now, his mind, usually so alert and quick to sift things, was confused too. For months past, he'd been afraid that Skeets was taking the wrong turn in the road. And only today, a deputation of the town's leading citizens had gone to Skeets, asking him to take the job which had known a Harbison for the past twenty years, to be sheriff.

Nothing would have pleased old Tom Harbison better, if he was where he could see and understand, than for a son to buckle on the old six-gun and pin on the worn badge which Tom Harbison had worn so long and honorably. Clint knew that. Nor could anything have pleased him quite so much. But Skeets had laughed—and refused.

"Doc! Oh doc, you there? There's a man hurt, down here."

Clint followed, a little wearily. A man hurt, perhaps by lead from a Harbison gun—another man killed. Well, at least, in working, he wouldn't have so much time to think. Always it was his job to follow in the aftermath of these shooting affrays, to try and heal the hurt which other men did. Tonight there was a hurt in his own heart which medicine couldn't reach.

The dead man was an outlaw, and nobody seemed to be mourning. But Clint's brows contracted a little at sight of the wounded man, lying there, limp and bloody, and close to death. He felt more than professional interest as he bent over him. Jim Cragie was of about Skeet's age, two or three years younger than the medico. The three of them had grown up together. And, until lately, when Skeets had taken

to running with the wild bunch, Jim and Skeets had been close friends.

Shorty Blake, deputy sheriff, who had been deputy under Tom Harbison and was still carrying on until a new sheriff could be appointed, came rolling bow-leggedly into the room, pushing back his hat and swiping a worried shirt-sleeve across a sweat-beaded forehead. His usually mild blue eyes looked tired and haunted, tonight, his face was older in the flickering light of the kerosene lamp. He nodded to Clint.

"How is he, Doc?" he demanded. "Bad as he looks?"

Clint nodded, straightening, reaching mechanically for his black bag.

"I'm afraid so, Shorty," he agreed. "I'll have to operate, right away. It's about a fifty-fifty chance, looks like."

"That bad?" Shorty sighed, his voice lowered. "Clint, you've got to pull him through, someway. Like you know, the bank was robbed tonight, and, well—Jim here, was where he could see who done it. And he's the only one who can tell us that. You see?"

A LEADEN weight seemed to be settling in Clint's chest, but he nodded. "Sure, I see, Shorty."

The deputy fidgeted, as though unsure. "Seems like the dead man was shot by this killer, that got away," he went on. "Which is plenty good for us, but bad business, just the same. Killers are always bad. I'm startin' out after him now, but it ain't likely I can trail him. But if Jim can live to tell who done it—" the deputy's jaw set like a steel trap. "Case like that, I'll trail that murderin' hombre to hell and back. So you've got to save him."

Shorty turned, merged with the shadows. From somewhere in the gloom of the next room, his voice floated back, detached and remote.

"I'll send Bud Lenihan to help you, Doc."

Clint scarcely heard him, or the closing of the door. His breath was coming faster now, his eyes sharp with mounting excitement as he stared down at the unconscious figure of Jim Cragie. No one knew, or even suspected, that he had been lurking in the shadows across the street there, or that he had seen anything. So far as the law knew, Jim was the only man who had been in a position to see who that bank robber had been—and if Jim was to die, now—

It would be easy, simple. Left alone, Jim might revive long enough to talk, to tell what he had seen. After that, he would sink again, and not recover. If Clint operated now, which was the only chance of saving his life, then, by being just a trifle careless, for just a few seconds—Jim would never be able to tell what he knew—to send Skeets Harbison to the gallows!

No one would know. Clint's hand shook a little as he laid out his tools in a neat row. He was going to operate tonight to kill a man, not to save him—and in his years of practice, here on the border, he had never even thought of doing such a thing before.

Ethics were all against him. But far stronger than that was his feeling in the matter. Even an hour ago, the very suggestion that he should do such a thing would have been repugnant to him. To kill a man. Moreover, Jim Cragie was his friend. Yet wasn't that better than to see Skeets sent to the gallows, the green memory of the hardly-buried sheriff turned yellow by such a thing, his own hard-won career blasted? Nobody would know....

Clint started, almost guiltily, at a step behind him, turned to see Bud Lenihan standing there. Bud was a big man, and beefy. Usually his face was florid, but tonight, in the yellow glow of the lamp, it looked white. His eyes were fixed on Jim Cragie, his breath coming a little jerkily.

"Hello, Doc," he said. "I—uh, Shorty sent me here to—to kind of lend a hand, if I can."

"Yes, he said he would." Clint had hold of himself now, his voice was steady again. "Build a fire in that stove and get some hot water. And wash your hands good. I'll have to operate."

"Sure. I can do that, all right." Bud moved to obey, surprisedly light on his feet for so ponderous a man. Clint adjusted the lamp a little, found a pan and dropped the instruments into it, pouring water over them, set the pan on the stove. He was aiming to kill a man tonight, but his routine had to be as careful as ever, so that no one would guess.

They would think that his skill hadn't been quite equal to the task.

"What's his chances, Doc?" Bud inquired over his shoulder.

"About fifty-fifty."

"That bad, eh?" The fire was crackling in the stove now, the water would soon be boiling. Clint had everything in readiness. Conditions were far from ideal, but he had worked under worse ones. Bud Lenihan crossed to stare down at the unconscious man, his big fingers building a fag with easy precision. He glanced swiftly at the darkened windows, crossed to the door, and Clint heard the key turn.

"Just so we won't be interrupted at the wrong time," Bud explained smoothly. "Might kind of upset you."

"Good idea," Clint agreed. "Bring that pan over here."

Bud obeyed. There was a grim smile on his face as he set it down.

"Doc, I reckon if you was to work it right—he could just sort of snuff out and nobody'd ever be the wiser, would they?"

CLINT glanced up, startled. Was the man a mind-reader? Bud's smile held a disconcerting quality.

"What do you mean?" Clint snapped.

"I mean, Doc, that if he don't talk again—there'll be a thousand bucks in it for you, for this operation. Better money than you usually make, ain't it?"

Clint stared. One side of his mind was shocked, but the other part of it was beginning to understand. His words were mechanical.

"Considerably better."

"Well, how about it?" Bud demanded. "Reckon I don't need to go into a lot of details—you ain't no fool. But he's the only man who saw that bank job done tonight. And—well, it'll be better, a lot better, if he don't do no talkin', Doc. You willing to make that thousand?"

Something in Clint's face seemed to give him the answer. Or maybe he had been sure all along, knowing Clint. For suddenly, with a smooth speed oddly at variance with his big bulk, a gun was in Bud's hand, catching the firelight, its muzzle very close to Clint's heart.

"I'm right here to help you, Doc," Bud said softly. "Like that fool Shorty sent me to do. And I ain't takin' any chances, see? No need for you to be a fool, too. If Jim sort of kicks off while you're operatin', I won't say a word about it. But if he comes to, then I'll give him a pill from this bottle I got in my hand—and another lead pill for you. So don't make no mistakes now, about how to do this job. And you better get started."

Clint stared at the leveled gun, his brows wrinkling a little, and in that moment the gunman was impressed with his resemblance to his father, Sheriff Tom Harbison. Curiously, Clint felt no fear, though he knew that he had never stood in greater peril in his life. Mechanically, he reached for one of his instruments and set to work, ignoring the gun. His mind was in turmoil again, but that did not impair the trained efficiency of his hands.

His worst trouble was to keep his mouth shut. He had a wild, almost insane impulse to open it and laugh, wildly, at himself, at Bud Lenihan, at life—and death, in general. Five minutes before, he had made up his mind to cast overboard all his principles, to do that which was utterly abhorrent to him—to kill a man.

And now he was being told to go ahead and do just that, being offered a fat fee for it, and threatened with death if he refused—with the same death inevitable for his patient anyway. That was irony. Even more so was the fact, now, he didn't know what he wanted to do, or what he was going to do.

If Bud had kept his mouth shut, he would have killed Jim Cragie. But to be bribed to do it—that was different. And to be threatened on top of that—that made it a whole lot different. A hell of a lot.

Funny, but up to now he hadn't even suspected that Bud Lenihan might be one of the outlaws who had been terrorizing this country of late. So far as he knew, no one else had guessed it, either. Big, easy-going Bud, running a livery stable and minding his own business.

Why didn't Bud have sense enough to just tell him that his own brother, Skeets, was one of the gang, and that if Jim Cragie lived to talk, Skeets would hang? That would have been the proper, and a far more effective appeal. But this thing of bribery, of threat—

It was on a par with all the rest, maybe crazier than the rest. But Clint's fingers, as much as his mind, had settled the question for him. He knew now that he wasn't going to kill Jim Cragie. He was going to save him, if he could—and that, cer-

tainly, was the craziest thing he'd ever done, for Jim was slated to die just as certainly, tonight, and he'd go along with him.

But that made it all right. For Jim would never live to tell what he knew about Skeets. The responsibility was all on Bud Lenihan now, not on himself. Bud, he saw suddenly, was staring at a small brown bottle in his open medicine case—a bottle which showed half filled with pills, and on the label was a skull and crossbones.

"Don't make no mistakes the wrong way, Doc," Bud warned suddenly. "I ain't foolin'."

Clint glanced up impatiently.

"Do you think you can murder both of us and get away with it, Bud?"

The big man nodded calmly.

"Yeah. I been thinkin' about that, too. A gun-shot or so might look funny, all right. But you've got stuff in that case of yore's that'd do just as well, I reckon—and nobody'll ever know what did happen. So don't be a fool. It won't help him none, but'll put you in the same boat along with him."

CLINT made no reply. Right now was the delicate part of the operation. He bent all his energies to the task, straining his eyes in the dim light. A single false move, right now, and Jim Cragie would die. He mustn't make a wrong motion. And then, with a puff of his breath as the idea came to him, Bud had blown the lamp out.

A total darkness closed down on the room like a blanket. A blackness in which Clint could almost hear the shadowy beat of wings of death. Bud had acted on sudden impulse, knowing that the operation was at a critical point. Clint knew that. But he was acting, on the contrary, with cool, sure reasoning. His voice snapped like a whip as he leaned forward.

"The point of my knife is against your heart, Bud. Feel it? Get that lamp lit in ten seconds—or I'll drive it in to the hilt."

He could hear Bud's sharply indrawn breath, wheezy with terror, as he applied a little pressure. The darkness had reversed the situation, for no longer was the six-gun in Bud's hand any good. The gunman thrust the weapon into its holster and fumbled hastily for a match. Clint heard him curse softly as his fingers came into contact with the hot lamp chimney, then he had it off, a match flared and was drawn across the wick, which, still hot, sprang back to a steady flame. As the chimney was replaced, Clint was back at work. It hadn't taken over a quarter of a minute.

That was only a temporary victory, however. For already, compelled to use both hands and eyes, that left Bud free, and Bud was pulling his gun again, and this time he was in a killing mood. There in the closed little room, with the reek of the blown-out lamp, Clint could feel and smell it—the strong, animal-like aura of the killer. He had known it before, and strong as it was now, there could be no mistaking it.

He might, of course, have thrust with that scalpel while he had a chance, Clint knew—one lunge would have buried the point deep in Bud's heart, for Clint knew his anatomy. To kill a man would be easy. But he'd put that thought behind him. His creed had always been to save life.

Bud was smiling, now, a grimly sardonic grin, as he figured this out, and knew that he had the upper hand.

"You're a damn fool, Doc," he said. "You aim for him to get well, eh?"

"That's my job, Bud."

"Yeah. And mine's to see that he don't. Well, I give you fair warnin'."

Holding the gun steady with one hand, Bud reached across to the open kit, plucking up that small brown bottle, keeping his eyes warily on the medico. He raised the bottle, drew the cork with his teeth. Then, still holding the gun steady, he leaned over the unconscious Jim Cragie, allowed a couple of the pills to trickle out and into his half-opened mouth, to roll down his throat. The pressure of the gun against Clint's ribs was ominous.

"Looks like you've got your job just about finished," Bud chuckled. "Nice piece of work. Folks'll never guess why he don't get conscious again. And if you kick off, too—well, there ain't no other medico in this country to figger out why. Take a couple of these pills yore own se'f, now."

He held the bottle to Clint's lips, the pressure of the gun menacing. Clint accepted the dose.

"I reckon that'd ought to be plenty, eh?" Bud asked, replacing the bottle. "Though if it ain't, I got plenty lead pills that'll

do the trick. But when stuff's marked with a skull and cross-bones, I know what that means."

"Yeah, the pills in that bottle you saw, one of them would kill a horse, if that makes you feel better," Clint said wearily. He turned toward Jim Cragie again. The operation was finished—a good job. He turned again, the knife in his hand whipped up, plunged deep—and Bud Lenihan, caught off guard, dropped in a heap, the gun exploding once, the bullet going into the ceiling.

THE shot was warning enough. There would be others along in a little while. Clint set to work to fix up this wound in his latest patient. It would be bad without proper care, but he knew just how, and where to strike. That was his business.

Footsteps were pounding outside now, excited voices. Men bursting in as Clint turned the key in the lock. And Jim Cragie was reviving, able to talk. Somehow, none of this night's work was turning out as Clint had planned, anywhere along the way. Everybody here would live—though Bud would hang, and so, he supposed, would Skeets. He'd balled a lot of things up—

Clint listened, incredulously. What was Jim Cragie saying? About Skeets Harbison being a deputy sheriff for months, an under-cover man who had been working with the outlaws, to get evidence? Adding that he reckoned Skeets would be willing to take over the sheriff's job in the open, after tonight.

Jim was naming the bank president himself as the man who had shot him—and head of the outlaws, with Bud Lenihan second, the livery stable used as a hide-out, right in town—

Clint, listening soberly, reflected that he'd been considerable of a fool, though not as great a one as he might have been. Not the only fool, either. Bud had recovered consciousness by now too, and he looked pretty sick, knowing that it was all up. But not too sick to ask a question.

"But you told me one of them pills would kill a horse, Doc," he protested. "And that skull and cross-bones—"

Clint's face relaxed in a grin.

"The pills in that bottle you saw would kill a horse," he admitted. "I saw you watchin' that bottle, and you told what you had in mind, Bud. So, while the light was out, I reached over and shifted bottles. Put another bottle that looked about the same in its place, and you never noticed. Nothing in that but some sugar pills for folks that figure they have to take something, or a doc ain't doing them no good."

AMAZING NEW LOW COST

SICKNESS AND ACCIDENT POLICY

INSURES YOUR WHOLE FAMILY

ONLY $1 FOR ALL

Now, we offer for your whole family, this amazing, new "United" Family Group Sickness and Accident Policy. You may include each and every member of your family in one application—mother, father, children, and even grandparents for only $1.00 a month for all. Don't wait—send coupon today. No Medical Examination.

$7,500.00 ACCUMULATED CASH for Stated Accidental Death

This wonderful, new kind of Insurance Policy pays cash benefits for any accidental death to any member of the family. It pays the applicant $25.00 weekly indemnity for SICKNESS or ACCIDENT — $25.00 weekly for HOSPITAL — $100.00 EMERGENCY allowance—many other liberal features—all as provided for in this remarkable policy.

SEND NO MONEY—FREE INSPECTION OFFER

William Lindbloom and family of Chicago, Ill., above, are all protected by their one "United" Policy. The United Insurance Co. is a dependable Company having $225,000.00 on deposit with Illinois Insurance Department for your protection. Send no money—just mail coupon for free inspection—no obligation.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

UNITED INSURANCE CO. NO AGENT
Elgin Tower, Suite G-76-G, Elgin, Ill. WILL CALL

Please mail me at once complete information and Free Inspection Offer of the "United" Family Group Sickness and Accident Policy. Send No Money.

Name .....

Address .....

Treat Yourself
To an Evening of
Gripping Western Action
READ
"Lynch-Rope Law"
By Davis Dresser
In the New October Issue of
Blue Ribbon Western
NOW ON SALE!

"But that man is unarmed," protested Pernberry.

SIX-GUN REVIVAL AT GOSPEL GULCH

By

A. Kenneth Brent

C. Lemuel Pernberry, Bible salesman, was a man of peace—but Luke Patchett and his gang underestimated the man!

A CURIOUS crowd in front of the Rawhide saloon watched the little man in the shiney black suit climb from the stagecoach and direct the unloading of two good-sized boxes. When the coach pulled out, the little man turned to the station agent and spoke a few words. The agent nodded and carried the boxes into his office. The newcomer straightened his stiff white collar, appraised the town's false-fronted building, and then ambled down the sidewalk toward the saloon loafers.

"Welcome tuh Hangman's Gulch, stranger," Big Red Simmons drawled. "Who be yuh and what's yore business?"

The little stranger smiled and wiped some dust from his mild blue eyes. "I am C. Lemuel Pernberry," he said. "A servant of the Lord, praise be."

Big Red sat up suddenly, his face contracting in a frown. "A preacher, eh?" he growled. "Well, listen, mister, Luke Patchett, th' boss of this town, don't allow no preachers tuh set up camp in Hangman's Gulch. Yuh'd better grab th' next stage out."

"You misunderstand me," Lemuel Pernberry said gently. "I am not a Gentleman of the Cloth but with my simple talents I do spread the Word of the Lord. I am a Bible salesman, gentlemen."

A roar of laughter greeted this announcement. "A Bible salesman!" guffawed Big Red Simmons. "Boys, did you hear that? A Bible salesman! Why, man, there ain't but one Bible in this town and th' man that owns it has been missin' fer two years. Yuh'd do better sellin' th' Police Gazette here!"

"I was aware of the lack of religious fer-

vor in Hangman's Gulch before I came here," Pernberry said softly. "I felt that it would be virgin territory in which to spread the Good Word."

Big Red stood up. "Boys, this calls fer a drink," he said. "Let's adjourn inside and let Mister Poonberry try tuh sell me a Bible. It'll be good practice."

The crowd pushed into the saloon, Lemuel Pernberry keeping abreast with Big Red Simmons. "Well, deacon," grinned Simmons, "What'll it be Scotch or Rye?"

Mr. Pernberry closed his eyes and said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging. I'll have a double beer, thank you kindly."

Drinks were served and Simmons again turned to the little Bible salesman. "Well," he grinned. "I'm ready tuh be sold a Bible."

Lemuel Pernberry shook his head. "I feel that you are not yet receptive," he said. "Tomorrow, perhaps, will be a better time."

Simmons became serious again. "Listen, Poonberry," he said. "I got my doubts about Luke Patchett lettin' you peddle yore books. Bein' his right-hand man, I'd better take yuh in to see him first."

"I have heard of Mister Patchett, and being a man of God, I must say that I do not approve of his methods of doing business, but I will be glad to interview him," Pernberry answered. He looked closely at Simmons. "For a member of Patchett's organization I must say that you are careless with your lethal weapons, brother. Your gun is belted far too high for a quick draw and the leather of the holster is stiff with newness—all of which would make for a very slow draw."

Big Red Simmons stared. "What do you know about guns?" he snapped.

"There was a time in my career when I too lived by violence," the Bible salesman said. "But that was before I saw the light."

"A little runt like you handling guns!" Simmons scoffed. "Well, come on, deacon. I'll take yuh back tuh see th' boss."

LUKE PATCHETT'S office in the back of the Rawhide saloon was in reality a small arsenal with Sharp's rifles, pistols, and derringers lining the walls. The only business appearance it had was a big iron safe in one corner and a battered mahogany desk in the middle of the floor. A tall man with a gaunt, hollow-cheeked face and slick black hair sat behind the desk.

Big Red Simmons cleared his throat. "Boss," he said, "this here stranger wants to sell Bibles in Hangman's Gulch. How about it?"

Luke Patchett looked up from his desk and studied Lemuel Pernberry with icy gray eyes. "No," he said softly. "The sooner you leave town the better, mister."

"I have traveled a long way to get to Hangman's Gulch," the little salesman answered carefully, "and I mustn't leave before my work is done. Naturally, if it is a question of paying a peddler's fee, I will be glad to comply."

"It's nothing to do with a fee," snapped Patchett. "I don't want any religious movements started in this town. When religion gets on th' march, there's likely to be a church started and when that happens, th' store owners and ranchers around here will have an organization that can buck my outfit. I'm th' law in Hangman's Gulch and I aim to stay that way, so I ain't givin' no one else a chance to organize. I've smashed three attempts to start a church, and I don't aim to let you go around puttin' ideas in th' town folks heads again. That means git, stranger!"

Mr. Pernberry looked troubled. "Really, Mr. Patchett," he said, "I find your attitude quite arbitrary."

Luke Patchett scrambled to his feet and grabbed Lemuel Pernberry roughly by the shoulder. "Listen, runt," he snarled, throwing open the door and waving his hand at a group of men around the bar, "there's ten men out there that belong to my outfit. There ain't none of 'em that's killed less than three men and there ain't none of 'em bad enough shots even to miss a pee-wee like you. Now you be out of this town by sun-up tomorrow, or you're liable tuh get hurt."

"Please, I do not approve of violence," said Pernberry. He smiled at Patchett and added pleasantly, "But really, brother, for a man who must live by the gun you are quite careless. The leather thong tying your weapon to your leg is much too loose. It might bring you much grief if ever you needed a split second badly."

PATCHETT swore and tightened the leather string.

An elderly, gray-haired rancher pushed through the batwing doors and attracted the outlaw boss' attention. He walked to the front of the saloon to meet the rancher.

"Well, Benson," Patchett said smoothly.

"I suppose you've come to pay off your loan. It's due today, you know."

"You know I can't pay off today, Patchett," Benson said. "You know that half my marketing herd was stolen last week. I'm askin' for an extension of time."

"I don't understand," said Patchett. "Why should I know your cattle had been stolen."

The rancher brought a black Stetson from behind his back. "This hat," he said, "has your name lettered in the inside. I found it on the spot my cattle were stolen from. I can't prove anything, but you can at least afford me an extension."

Before Lemuel Pernberry could shout a warning or the rancher could move a muscle Luke Patchett's gun roared. A look of horrified surprise appeared on Benson's face as he clutched his stomach and wilted to the floor. Patchett holstered his gun and turned around. "Boys," he said, "you heard Benson insult me. I had to defend my honor, didn't I? Guess we can take over his ranch now without any trouble."

Pernberry's face was grave. "That man was without weapons," he said.

Big Red Simmons grunted. "So what? He culdn't have beat Luke tuh the draw anyhow."

The little Bible salesman headed for the door. "There is great need for the spreading of the Good Word in this town," he mumbled softly as he left.

THERE WERE a few good men in Hangman's Gulch, Lem Pernberry discovered. He talked with Mike Bradford, who ran the general store, Sam Peevey, owner of the Red Horse Cafe, Mel Root of the livery stable, and a few other townsmen. They were all honest men and wanted their town to be a respectable place. The little Bible salesman knew that it was fear for the safety of their families that kept them from organizing and throwing off the yoke of Luke Patchett's lawless rule. Each of these men whispered the same thing to Pernberry, "You'd better leave town while you're still alive. Patchett doesn't bluff."

At dark Pernberry went to the hotel and paid for a room. He climbed into the lumpy bed and was just beginning to doze when a knock sounded at the door. "Come in," he grumbled.

The door opened and Big Red Simmons stepped inside. He squinted through the darkness and made out the form of the little salesman lying comfortably in bed. "Poonberry," he said, "Patchett sent me around just tuh make sure that you're gonna be gone come morning. Th' stage leaves here at five a. m."

Lemuel Pernberry yawned. "Sorry that I cannot oblige Mr. Patchett, brother," he said. "But my work demands that I remain for a day or so."

Simmons got a string of cuss words half out of his mouth then changed his tone abruptly. "By th' way, Penberry," he said cautiously, "I don't see any of them Bibles of yores lying around here. Where do yuh keep 'em?"

"Oh," said the Bible salesman, "I left them at the express office. The boxes were much too heavy to carry."

"Well, listen, mister, I'll give you one more chance to say you'll get—" The sound of snoring interrupted Big Red. He snorted disgustedly and stomped from the room.

THE MORNING sun had climbed high before Lem Pernberry roused himself from the bed, dressed, and hurried down to the Red Horse cafe for breakfast. "I'm a chronic late sleeper, Mr. Peevey," he complained. "That is my one great weakness. I'll have to hurry all day now to get my Bibles sold before dark."

Sam Peevey shoved a platter of eggs and bacon across the counter to Pernberry and cleared his throat. "Don't reckon you heard about the robbery last night then," he said.

The little salesman looked surprised. "Robbery," he said. "I haven't heard a thing about it. Who was robbed?"

"Well, th' express office was broke into last night, but I' reckon you're th' man that was really robbed," the cafe owner answered. "Max, th' express agent, stopped in here this morning and said that some bunch had broke into his office last night but th' only thing they took were th' two big boxes that had your Bibles in them."

Mr. Pernberry ate his breakfast in sober silence. His only comment on the robbery was, "Well, now that's right unfortunate."

Lem Pernberry left the cafe, went to the express office to make sure the books had not been recovered, and made his way from there to the newspaper office. He talked briefly with Matt Weaver, editor of the Hangman's Gulch Chronicle, and the editor wrote down what he said. Then the little Bible salesman went back to his hotel room and went to sleep.

When the afternoon edition of Matt Weaver's newspaper came off of the press, it carried this ad on the front page:

STOLEN FROM LOCAL EXPRESS OFFICE, two boxes of gilt-edged Holy Bibles. Unless the persons responsible return these books before sundown, grave counter-measures will be taken by the owner to retrieve rightful property. Will the attention of Luke Patchett pleased be called to this advertisement?

—C. Lemuel Pernberry

At sundown Lem Pernberry left his room and went downstairs. Sam Peevey, Matt Weaver, and Mike Bradford were waiting in the lobby for him. "Listen, Pernberry," Peevey said tensely, "Luke Patchett and his gang are going to kill you as soon as you step into the street. When Patchett saw that ad, he nearly blew his top." Matt Weaver continued, "He and his men have been patroling th' street for nearly an hour. What do you aim to do?"

"I aim to go get my books, brother," replied Pernberry.

Mike Bradford's face grew purple. "Hell, man," he snapped, "You ain't got a chance. A live Bible salesman without any Bibles is better off than a dead salesman with some."

"Granted," said Mr. Pernberry, "but I have no intention of becoming a casualty." He slipped out of his long black coat and folded it over a chair. The coat had concealed two ebony-handled forty-fives encased in smooth, well-oiled brown leather and slung low on the little salesman's slim hips. The three townsmen's eyes bulged at the incongruous sight. They said nothing as the little stranger headed for the door. He stopped and looked back. 'By th' way, Mr. Peevey," he said, "just in case you ever have need to use your gun, I would recommend that you file a little off of your hammerdog. It's just apt to catch on your pants being as long as it is."

THERE were a few men loitering in the building doorways when Lemuel Pernberry stepped from the hotel. Except for this there was no sign of life. At the far end of the street the little salesman saw Luke Patchett push through the batwing doors of his saloon and advance slowly toward him. Pernberry began a steady walk to meet him.

When twenty feet separated them, Patchett stopped. His thin, gaunt face was white with rage. "You overplayed your hand, squirt," he said tensely. "I gave you a chance to get out. Now I'm going to take pleasure in killing you personally. No man can make a fool of me and live to tell about it."

Mr. Pernberry cleared his throat. "Please, brother," he said, "although I do not approve of you as a man, I have every desire to avoid violence. If you will return my Bibles, I will be gracious enough to overlook the blackness of your deed."

Luke Patchett's lips tightened in a grimace of hatred. "Here's th' answer to your fancy talk." His hand streaked downward in a lightning fast sweep.

What happened next is mainly a matter of opinion since most of the men who witnessed it died. A gun appeared in Lem Pernberry's hand and bullet thunder crashed through the quiet street. The first slug kicked Luke Patchett back a full yard and sent the gun spinning from his hand. The next bullet knocked him face down into the white dust.

The little Bible salesman pivoted in the same second that Patchett fell and slammed a shot into the chest of a man who fired at him from behind. A rifleman stationed on top of the Rawhide saloon screamed and toppled over the railing as Pernberry's gun sounded again.

The bark of guns from the buildings drove the salesman to the ground. He sprawled flat and tried to spot the hidden guns. Bullets kicked up the white dust around him and he winced as a lead slug singed his shoulder. His gun cracked in defiance but no visible target was in sight.

Another bullet grazed Mr. Pernberry's face and he twisted to a new position. Suddenly more guns sounded in the fray. One of Patchett's henchmen tumbled from a doorway clutching his stomach. Another staggered out into the street, bleeding. He fell and lay still. Lemuel Pernberry grinned. The new guns were firing from the hotel. He saw Sam Peevey leaning out of an upstairs window and waved.

Another Patchett man fell heavily from a doorway onto the board sidewalk and then the fight was over. A few six-shooters sailed out into the street and the remainder of Luke Patchett's desperadoes came out of their hiding places with hands held high.

C. Lemuel Pernberry scrambled up from the dust and began to brush himself off. He met the crowd of admiring townsmen who surrounded him with a smile.

"Righteousness shall prevail," he said. "Now, brother, if you attend to the deceased, I shall go to Mr. Patchett's office and retrieve my Bibles."

The editor of the Hangman's Gulch Chronicle stopped him. "Mr. Pernberry," he said, "I'm getting out an extra to spread the news that Luke Patchett's rule is broken. Can I get a statement from you?"

"Gladly, brother," the little salesman smiled. "Will you please announce that a revival meeting will be held tomorrow at sunrise. Bibles will be for sale. Oh, yes, it will be appreciated if every member of the late Luke Patchett's organization and every person of bad repute in the town will attend also. You may say that Mr. Pernberry stresses this latter point emphatically."

Ten minutes later the Bible salesman emerged from the Rawhide Saloon dragging his two boxes.

THE main street of Hangman's Gulch was filled with people by sunrise. Standing on improvised platform, Lemuel Pernberry motioned for silence. "Bibles are now for sale," he announced. "I feel that it is only fair that repenting members of Luke Patchett's organization and other, ah, unsavory citizens be given first opportunity to buy. A line will form on my right please."

With Big Red Simmons bringing up the rear, twenty men stepped into line. Solemnly Mr. Pernberry accepted two dollars from each of the men and handed them a Bible in exchange. At Big Red he paused. "Ah, Brother Simmons," he said. "I have one copy of this special large size, morocco bound edition," he held up the book. "I have been saving it especially for you. A bargain at ten dollars, sir." Big Red purchased it eagerly.

In half an hour all of the Bibles were sold. Again Mr. Pernberry motioned for silence. "Brothers," he said, "the stagecoach has arrived and I must go. I'm sure that you can organize a church successfully and see to it that Mr. Patchett's men become adept at the scriptures."

A shout of approval went up from the crowd.

"But before I leave I have one suggestion," he continued. "I would like to suggest that the name of your town be changed from Hangman's Gulch to, ah, Gospel Gulch."

The crowd was still shouting its approval when the stage carried Lemuel Pernberry out of Gospel Gulch.

The little Bible salesman leaned back in his seat with a heavy sigh and looked at the crisp, green bills in his wallet. "The way of truth is hard," he said, closing his eyes, "but the servants of the Lord shall prosper!"

WORLD'S LARGEST DENTAL PLATE MAKERS Now "by" Mail
FALSE TEETH
On 60 Days' Trial!
from Our Laboratory Direct to You!
Dental Plates made to measure—individuality—by MAIL. Take own impression at home. Over 100,000 men & women wear teeth we made
$7.95 to $35
Model Photo
MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!
SEND NO MONEY!
FREE Impression Material, Information, Catalog, Low Prices.
UNITED STATES DENTAL CO.
1555 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. A-A40 CHICAGO, ILL.

POEMS WANTED FOR MUSICAL SETTING
Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. Don't delay—send us your original poem at once for immediate consideration and FREE Rhyming Dictionary.
RICHARD BROTHERS 147 Woods Building, Chicago, Ill.

Learn this Profitable Profession
in 90 Days at Home
Hundreds of men and women of all ages 18-50 make $10.00 to $20.00 in a single day giving scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is a big demand from Hospitals, Sanitariums, Clubs, Doctors and private patients as well as opportunities for establishing your own office.
Learn this interesting money-making profession in your own home by mail, through our home study course. Same instructors as in our NATIONALLY KNOWN resident school. A diploma is awarded upon completion of the course. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. High School training is not necessary. Many earn big money while learning.
Anatomy Charts
Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE
Enroll now and we will include uniform coat, medical dictionary, patented reducing roller and Hydro-Therapy supplies without extra cost. The reducing course alone may be worth many times the modest tuition fee.
Send coupon now for Anatomy Charts and booklet containing photographs and letters from successful graduates. These will all be sent postpaid—FREE.
The College of Swedish Massage
(Successor to National College of Massage)
Dept. 803—30 E. Adams St., Chicago.
You may send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, booklet containing photographs and letters from graduates, and complete details of your offer.
Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....

• GUNSMOKE CURE •

★ By Lee Floren ★

The brand of the coward was on Rusty Midland and old John Regis knew something had to be done. Rusty wasn't yellow—the way he walked up to Snake Carlew and smashed in his face when the varmint had his gun on Rusty showed that. But the kid had been hurt once and he'd come out with a fear of shooting . . .

OUTLAWS LIVE or die according to their gun speed. And, if their guns hang in leather, if the other fellow outshoots them, they die smiling. That is the outlaw code—to go out with a smile . . . To face death and never know fear.

Old John Regis was thinking of that code now as he leaned against the Mercantile Store and watched young Rusty Midland, there across Calico's dusty main street. Rusty Midland was Calico's sheriff. And, from what John Regis had heard, Rusty Midland was a coward. And John Regis knew that Rusty Midland should not have been a coward. For Rusty was Bill Midland's son, and Bill Midland and John Regis had ridden the Outlaw Trail together. And Bill Midland, Rusty's father, had been fearless.

Something was wrong with Rusty Midland.

John Regis knew that. So had old Bill Midland when he lay dying, a lawman's bullet in his back. Bill Midland had clutched old John Regis' hand, had whispered hoarsely.

"Ride north, John. My kid—Rusty—needs your guns, John. He's a sheriff. . ."

John Regis said, "I've never met Rusty, but I'll bet he's a chip off'n the ol' block. How could I help him?"

"He got into gun-trouble, John. He's lost his guts. He's in Calico, up in Wyomin'. You'll ride up there . . . after I'm gone, John?"

"I sure will, Bill."

"Gratias, amigo," Bill Midland murmured.

So now John Regis was in Calico, watching Rusty Midland. He'd heard all about Rusty. How Rusty Midland, single-handed, had broken up a bank holdup. Guns had roared and spat flame. And Rusty had been shot down.

He'd laid in bed for over a month, unconscious and raving. Doc Winters said a bullet had creased his skull and was putting pressure on his brain. The doc, through surgery, had relieved the pressure.

But the medico, and his forceps, could never take away the fear that had been planted in Rusty Midland's heart!

John Regis had been in Calico only two days but, in that time, he had learned much. Snake Carlew, owner of the Mission Bar, had it in for Rusty. Word had gone around Calico that Carlew aimed to tangle with Rusty the next time Rusty went into the Mission Bar.

And Carlew was tough. He had ridden into Calico some five years before astraddle a wind-broken bronc. Using his guns and crooked cards, he'd built up a small fortune at the Mission and had bought neighboring ranches. His riders used long loops and his herds built up quickly . . . But now Rusty stood in Carlew's way. And Carlew aimed to get rid of Rusty.

Now Rusty Midland crossed the street and headed toward John Regis. He halted in front of Regis and said, "You aim to stay in Calico a spell, drifter?"

"I do," John Regis said.

"No offense meant," Rusty said quietly. "Jus' wanted to make sure. Too many gunfighters driftin' in on these ranges, an' I sorta check up on them. You workin' for Snake Carlew?"

John Regis smiled. "That dog's money's no good to me," he said meaningly.

"I savvy," Rusty Midland said. He stood there momentarily, looking at Mary Manning coming down the street toward him, and John Regis studied his old part-

(Continued On Page 86)

STOP worrying—the true facts about SEX are frankly revealed!

AWAY with false modesty! At last a famous doctor has told *all* the secrets of sex in frank, daring language. No prudish beating about the bush, no veiled hints, but TRUTH, blazing through 576 pages of straightforward facts.

Love is the most *magnificent ecstasy* in the world... know how to hold your loved one, don't glean half-truths from unreliable sources. Now you can know how to end ignorance... fear... and self denial!

Everything pertaining to sex is discussed in daring language. All the things you have wanted to know about your sex *life*, information about which other books only vaguely hint, is yours at last.

MORE THAN 100 VIVID PICTURES

The 106 illustrations leave little to the imagination . . . know how to overcome physical mismating... know what to do on your wedding night to avoid the torturing results of ignorance.

Some will be offended by the amazing frankness of this book and its vivid illustrations, but the world has no longer any use for prudery and false modesty.

Don't be a *slave* to ignorance and fear. Enjoy the rapturous delights of the perfect Love life!

Lost love... scandal... divorce... can often be prevented by knowledge. Only the ignorant pay the *awful penalties* of wrong sex practises. Read the facts, clearly, startlingly told... study these illustrations and grope in darkness no longer.

SEND NO MONEY!

To show you our faith in your satisfaction with this amazing book, we are offering it to you on trial. You send no money—just fill out the coupon below and then when it arrives, in plain wrapper, pay the postman $2.98 plus postage. Keep the book five days, then if you are not completely satisfied, send it back and we will refund your money immediately without question. "Eugenics and Sex Harmony" will not be sold to minors.

ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX!

Know *how to enjoy* the thrilling experiences that are your birthright... know how to attract the opposite sex... how to hold love.

Are you an awkward novice in the art of love-making? Or, a master of its difficult technique? Knowledge is the basis of the perfect, satisfying love life. Ignorance leads to fear, worry, disease and shame. End ignorance *today*. You owe it to yourself—to the one you love—to read this book NOW!

A FAMOUS JUDGE SAYS THAT MOST DIVORCES ARE CAUSED BY SEX IGNORANCE!

■ When a man and woman who have been mutually attracted to each other and have enjoyed each other's company separate, there must be some tragic misunderstanding. In most cases this misunderstanding is due to sex ignorance.

IS SEX IGNORANCE DRIVING THE ONE YOU LOVE INTO THE ARMS OF ANOTHER?

■ Learn how to keep the love of your husband or wife at the high pitch of thrilling devotion. A satisfactory sex life will bind your loved one to you for all time.

STATE AGE WHEN ORDERING

OVER 100 GRAPHIC Illustrations

WHAT EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW

The Sexual Embrace
Secrets of the Honeymoon
Mistakes of Early Marriage
Venereal Diseases
Can Virility Be Regained?
Sexual Starvation
Glands and Sex Instinct
The Truth About Abuse

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

Joys of Perfect Mating
What to Allow a Lover to Do
Intimate Feminine Hygiene
Birth Control
How to Attract and Hold Men
Sexual Slavery of Women
Essentials of Happy Marriage
The Sex Organs

There is no longer any need to pay the *awful price* for one moment of bliss. Read the scientific pathological facts told so bravely by Dr. Rubin. The chapters on venereal disease are alone worth the price of this book!

You want to know, and you *should* know *everything* about sex. Sex is no longer a sin, a mystery, it is your greatest power for happiness. You owe it to yourself, to the one you love, to tear aside the curtain of hypocrisy and learn the *naked truth!*

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
1790 Broadway, Dept. 1019, New York, N. Y.

Please send me, "Eugenics and Sex Harmony" in plain wrapper. If I am not completely satisfied I can return the book and the entire purchase price will be refunded immediately. Also send me free of charge your book on "New Birth Control Facts."
☐ Send C.O.D. plus postage. ☐ I enclose $2.98, ship postpaid.

Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....Age.....
Orders from Foreign Countries 15 Shillings in Advance

This AMAZING NEW BOOK

Included FREE at *extra charge*

Dr. Clinton in his book **Birth Control Facts**, explains the theory and practice of the Ogino-Knaus method of rhythmic birth control. He also gives his table of the "safe" and "fertile" periods—to control conception.

This book is sent FREE and is included without extra charge with every purchase of EUGENICS and SEX HARMONY.

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
1790 Broadway, Dept. 1019 New York City

(Continued From Page 84)

ner's son. Rusty was tall—taller even than Bill Midland—but he lacked Bill Midland's strength. Bill had been solid, and Rusty was slender. John Regis looked at Mary Manning.

She was dark and small and filled with beauty. She stopped and said to John, "Hello," and then to Rusty, "Where were you going before you stopped to talk with this stranger?"

"Into the Mission," Rusty said.

She said, "Snake Carlew's in there. He wants to gun it out with you, Rusty. Don't go in there!"

"That's idle talk, Mary."

"But it isn't—"

"It is, though."

She said, "Rusty—" but he turned and walked away. John Regis watched her as she stood there, looking at Rusty leave. Her face was showing conflicting emotions. "He's walking into trouble," she told old John.

"I'll follow him," John Regis said.

Mary Manning looked at John Regis' twin .45s. They were tied tightly to the old outlaw's thighs, and their walnut butts were worn smooth. She asked suddenly, "Who are you?"

"A friend of Rusty's, girl."

"But you hardly know Rusty. You've only been in town two days. I saw you ride in. I was watching through the bank window."

"I see . . ."

"I work in the bank," she explained. "Morton, the banker, told me Carlew aimed to kill Rusty."

"Morton and Carlew friends?"

"Not exactly, but Carlew deals through the bank. And he tells Morton—" She halted, her brow furrowed. "Rusty's goin' into the Mission now."

"I'm headin' after him," John Regis said.

BUT old John was too late. Already the trouble had started. Even as he went through the batwing doors, he heard Snake Carlew's harsh voice raised in anger. He halted in the doorway, his hands on his holstered guns, and watched the drama unrolling before his eyes.

He had seen similar conflicts many times before. But always, before, there had been two brave men ready to pitch into violent action—now that, too, had changed. He looked at Rusty Midland, and his heart became a tight ball.

For Rusty was afraid. Fear tore at him. His face, his lips, his eyes—they all showed fear. He stood there at the bar, an untouched drink before him, his eyes on Snake Carlew, who stood beside him, openly cursing him.

This Snake Carlew was a squat, rolling man, round and hard and tough. He had a big, heavy head, and it was set on wide, muscular shoulders. He was coarse and he was all steel. John Regis had seen men like Carlew before. Brutal, domineering, they had no fear; they were savage, ruthless.

"You yellow-livered coward!" Carlew snarled. "Pull your gun, and fight! Or turn in your badge, and get outa Calico! We don't need yeller-bellies like you clutterin' up this burg!"

"You talk big," Rusty Midland said.

"An' I'm the gent to back up my talk," Carlew assured. His eyes became mere slits under his craggy brows. "You drawin' er driftin'?"

"Neither," Rusty said.

An ominous silence followed. Townsmen and range-riders, grouped around the big barroom, watched the scene tensely, making no move to interfere. This was not their fight.

Then Snake Carlew drew his gun.

His draw was fast—but not too fast, John Regis noted quickly. John Regis looked at Rusty Midland. Rusty made no move to draw. And Snake Carlew sent a bullet plowing into the floor at Rusty's feet.

Rusty jumped. Still, he didn't draw. He seemed frozen, held tightly by fear. And a great pity entered John Regis' heart. Yet, he watched closely, holding his emotions in check.

Carlew shot again.

This time, the bullet landed closer to Rusty's boots. And again, Rusty didn't draw. His right fist shot out, clipped Carlew hard on his rocky jaw. The blow sent the squat man staggering backwards, and Rusty hit him again.

Carlew went back against the wall. His eyes, dazed, groggy, showed surprise. He tried to swing his gun around again, and Rusty hit again. But Rusty missed, and Carlew's gun rose. The barrel steadied on Rusty's chest.

Rusty's face paled. Again, at sight of

the gun, fear gripped him. Carlew's thumb moved back with the hammer. It steadied—

John Regis stepped in, then. Old John's twin .45s were out, their barrels jutting, and rock-steady. They covered Snake Carlew. John Regis' voice cut the heavy silence.

"Drop that hammer, Carlew, an' I'm killin' you in your boots!"

Carlew turned, stared. For the first time, he saw John Regis. He said huskily, "An' who t'hades are you?"

"Never mind who I am," John Regis said. "Jus' lower that gun, feller!"

Carlew's eyes widened. He whipped a hurried glance over his gunmen, but he found no help there, They, too, were caught flat-footed. And the minute one of them made a move to pull his cutter, John Regis would swing his guns . . . and down him. And they knew it!

And Snake Carlew lowered his gun!

"Come 'ere, Rusty," John Regis ordered.

Rusty came up to John Regis and asked, "What's up, fella?"

"Your bronc's tied to the hitchrack in front," John Regis said, never taking his eyes from Carlew and his gunhands. "Step intuh leather an' wait for me. We got some ridin' to do!"

"Ridin'? Where to?"

John Regis said softly, "Jus' trust me, Rusty. But Calico's too small for you now —you showed the white feather an' they'll kill you off! Jus' don't ask no questions. Get on your bronc. I'll be along directly."

Rusty Midland looked at John Regis for some time and then he said, "Okay, stranger," and he went outside, the batwing doors brushing shut behind him. John Regis backed toward the door, his guns up and ready.

"Nobody's follerin' us," he warned the crowd. "If'n anybody does, he's gettin' hot lead through his gizzard. Savvy?"

Carlew laughed. "You take that white-bellied sheriff with you, stranger, an' nobody will foller you! Nobody'd want that coward aroun'! Good riddance fer Calico, I'll say!"

John Regis' eyes narrowed. "That boy's no coward," he maintained. "He's a sick man, that's all. I'm bringin' him back here some day an' then get down on your prayer-bones, Carlew!"

"I'll wait for that day," Carlew promised.

Old John backed into the batwing doors, paused momentarily with his guns covering

(Continued On Page 88)

THE ORIGINAL
BLUE BOOK

• Get this Big, Complete 72 page *Original* Blue Book. Contains mystifying novelties, magicians and conjurers specialties—DICE-CARDS-GAMES, Inks, Layouts, etc. Supplies of all kinds. Write today!

H. C. EVANS & CO.
Dept. 22-K 1520 WEST ADAMS STREET • CHICAGO

SIDE-LINE SALESMEN AND AGENTS sell our illustrated Comic Booklets, and other novelties. Each booklet size 4½ by 2¾. Ten different sample booklets sent for 50c or 25 assorted for $1.00 or 100 assorted for $2.00. Shipped prepaid. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No orders sent C. O. D. Send Cash, Stamps or Money-Order. Repsac Sales Co., 1 W. 13th St., Dept. D-10, N. Y. C.

KNOW YOUR FORTUNE

The WITCH O' THE HILLS has consented to tell your fortune. Enclose one dollar, stating your sex and age. Write three wishes. Additional wishes, fifty cents each. She will tell whether your wishes will come true or not, probably explaining in detail why. As the WITCH tells your fortune, it will be transcribed and forwarded to you. Money refunded if not satisfied. Folks she is GOOD! Address fortune requests to: AGENT, Box 807, Kerrville, Texas.

LONELY?

Find your sweetheart thru my Social Correspondence Club. Membership of refined Ladies and sincere Gentlemen of all ages, types and religions all over U. S. My service is CONFIDENTIAL. Sealed particulars sent FREE.

I. BULLION, Station H, Box 43-M, New York

FALSE TEETH Low as $6.85

90 DAYS TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMINE THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for you BY MAIL from your mouth-impression! Money-Back GUARANTEE of Satisfaction. FREE impression material, directions. Booklet of New Styles and Information. Write today to

FREE

SEND NO MONEY

PARKER DENTAL LAB.
127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 18-K, Chicago, Ill.

CARDS — DICE

Inks, daubs, ink & tailor-made readers, three-way dice, tops, shapes, books, jokes, novelties. Magical supplies. Catalog Free.

VINE, HILL & CO., Dept. D, Swanton, Ohio

Men Make 75% Profit

Buy and sell personal needs, drug sundries, razor blades and etc. Good side line. Send for free catalogue. Edwards Products Co., 1918 Humboldt Blvd., Chicago, Ill., Dept. H.

LONELY?

Let me help you find romance, happiness. Nationwide membership; sincere, attractive people you would love to meet; many with means. 22 years' dependable service; "Proven Results." Write today for interesting particulars, descriptions sent sealed.

MRS. BUDD, Box 753-A, San Francisco, Calif.

WANTED
MEN and WOMEN
Work For The GOVERNMENT
Salaries $1700-$2600 Per Year

No Layoffs! Vacations With Pay!
Regular Raises! Good Pensions!

A LIFETIME JOB

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS

City Mail Carriers	Clerks—File Clerks
Post Office Clerks	Stenographers—Typists
Rural Mail Carriers	Statistical Clerks (Ass't)
Customs Inspectors	Junior Messengers
Patrol Inspectors	Immigration Inspectors

Accounting and Auditing Assistants

Pay for Course Only After You Are Appointed & Working

So sure are we that our simplified Interstate Home Study Course of coaching will result in your passing the government examination and being appointed, that we are willing to accept your enrollment on the following basis. The price of our complete 10-week lesson course is $30 plus $3 Examiner's Fee. This examiner's fee is for correcting and grading the entire course, and is payable only upon acceptance of your enrollment.

We are willing to give you any course with the understanding that you are to pay for it ONLY AFTER YOU ARE APPOINTED AND WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

Send No Money! Full Particulars Free!

Clip and Mail This Coupon NOW!

INTERSTATE HOME STUDY ACADEMY
901 Broad St., Div. H-10, Newark, N. J.

Please RUSH me FREE particulars, without any obligation, how to qualify for a government job.

Name .....
(Please print plainly in pencil)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

(Continued From Page 87)

the crowd, and then he said, "Adios, gents!" Hidden behind the doors, outside now, he whirled, ran to his bronc, swung up and reined close to Rusty Midland, who was already mounted.

"Foller me, Rusty," he said.

THEY rode out of Calico on the dead gallop, with old John Regis twisted in saddle, his guns covering the Mission Bar. The flying hoofs of their broncs kicked up dust behind them. The Carlew men debouched from the saloon, but made no move to follow them. Nor was there a gun fired in the crowd.

They rode on.

Three days later, old John Regis hunkered on his bootheels in the brush, high on the rimrock south of Calico. Below him in the canyon, a dim trail twisted through the buckbrush. The moonlight shone hard and brittle on the hills and cliffs. Soon a rider came along that trail.

Rifle in hand, John Regis slipped through the brush, and halted beside the trail, and waited. Soon the rider came around the bend.

"Mary Manning," John Regis grunted. "Now what the heck's she doin' out here in the badlands?"

His question was soon answered. The girl drew in her lathered sorrel and asked, "Where's Rusty?"

"Back in camp," John Regis said. "How'd you fin' out we was in this section, girl?"

Mary smiled. "Just figured I'd find you two here," she said. Her next words came hesitantly. "How's Rusty?"

"Still afraid of guns, girl."

"What's wrong? Is he—a coward?"

Old John Regis bristled inwardly. No son of Bill Midland's was a coward! "He's no coward," he maintained hotly. "If'n he was, do you think he'd of tackled Snake Carlew with his fists, down in Calico? Carlew had a gun on him—despite that, Rusty tied into him an' was fixin' to fist-whip him when Carlew got his gun in action again. No, Rusty ain't no coward. He's jus' ascared of a gun, that's all."

"But why?"

"Rusty was hurt bad when he broke up that bank stickup. He never got over that." He thought of telling her more: about other men he had seen that had gun-fear—men he had met on the hootowl trail, but he

changed his mind. It would do no good.

"Who are you?" Mary asked.

John Regis said, "I used to know Rusty's father, girl."

Her brows rose. "His father? Why, I never heard Rusty mention his father. Where's his father now?"

"He's dead."

"And you and he were friends?"

"Yes."

She asked, "What'd you intend to do with Rusty?"

"There's only two ways to get a man over gun fear, Mary. One is to get him to handle guns. Get him to fire his gun and get used to it again. That's what I been doin' with Rusty the last few days. Gettin' him to fire his gun again an' again at targets, at squirrels, at coyotes."

"What happened?"

John Regis spoke slowly, "No good, girl."

Her brow furrowed. "What is the other way to get a man over gun fear?"

"Put him out where the guns are roarin'," John Regis said. "Get him mad enough where he'll fight for somethin' he wants, somethin' he loves. When he gets in a tight like that, he'll fight so hard an' so fas' he'll forget he was ever afraid of a gun."

Mary's face brightened. "I got it," she said.

John Regis looked at her. "What'd you mean?"

She spoke hurriedly, rapidly. And the tale she told left John Regis pale-faced, made his mind work swiftly. He had never heard such a story before, and the hearing of it now left him angry inside.

"So they aim to hol' up the bank, huh?"

"That's it," Mary said. "I know all about it. I overheard them talking in Morton's office. Morton's my boss, the town banker, you know. They aim to hold it up next Saturday."

"Do they know you heard their plans?"

"No, that's the best part of it. On Saturday night the cowboys'll all be in town. They'll be celebratin' an' drunk. When word comes that the bank's been robbed, they'll be under the weather so much they probably won't be able to make up a posse. But there won't be any posse. Morton'll see to that. Anyway, it'll work off without a hitch, the way they figure."

(Continued On Page 90)

SUPER JU JITSU

NOW— YOU CAN Destroy Your Enemy Quick!

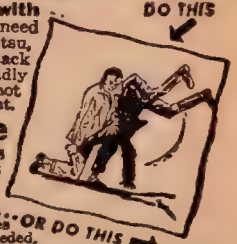
WHEN THIS HAPPENS TO YOU···

DO THIS

BE A ONE-MAN BLITZ! Strike with Commando lightning! You don't need ox-like muscles to use Super Ju Jitsu, most powerful of all defense and attack methods. Technique is the deadly secret. Brains count—not size, not strength. Almost miraculously efficient.

Gain Self-Confidence

KNOW how YOU can lick brutes twice your size with your bare hands only, even when they are ARMED with gun, knife, club. Get ready now for any emergency—protect your loved ones. Amazing self-study course teaches you double-quick. No boring exercises needed.



OR DO THIS

Send for Exciting Details—Free!

FREE Startling Low Price. Satisfaction Guaranteed or your money back. Mail coupon now

NELSON CO., 500 Sherman Street
DEPT. K-520, CHICAGO, ILL.

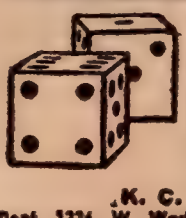
Please rush me free the hard-hitting details about "Super Ju Jitsu." No obligation on my part.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Let us help you find real happiness. Join our old reliable club. 42 years of dependable, confidential service. Correspondents most everywhere. Many with means, seeking congenial mates. Proven results. Photos, descriptions free.
STANDARD CLUB, Box C-40, Gray Lake, Ill.

FREE! FAMOUS BLUE BOOK CATALOG



DICE • CARDS

Perfect Dice, Magic Dice, Magic Cards—*READ THE BACKS*—Inks, Daubs, Poker Chips, Gaming Layouts, Dice Boxes, Counter Games, Punchboards. WRITE FOR CATALOG TODAY.

K. C. CARD CO.
Dept. 1234, W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

If you want a "wife," "husband," or "sweetheart," tell us your age, description of your "ideal," and by return mail you will receive sealed particulars of one of the oldest, most modern Clubs, in America, representing many wealthy educated members.

R. E. SIMPSON Box 1251 U. S. A. Denver, Colo.

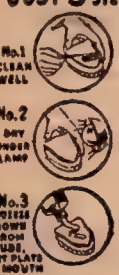
TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH or No Cost!

FREE OFFER FOR FALSE TEETH

Here's new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent . . . enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. **CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST.**

Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. **No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth.** Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed . . . it's harmless. **NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! Does Not Burn or Irritate.** If not satisfied, even after 4 months, return partly used tube for full refund.

JUST 3 STEPS



SEND NO MONEY

You must be one hundred per cent delighted or no cost. Try it for four months and return for full refund if not satisfied. Order at once and we'll include free with your order a tube of Crown's Dental Plate Cleaner. Rush coupon. Pay postman one dollar for combination plus postage, or send cash and we pay postage. Act now.

READ THIS:

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." Reline your plates with CROWN. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of CROWN RELINER today.

CROWN PLASTICS CO.
Dept. 3410
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave.
Detroit, Mich.

Send your wonderful Crown Dental Palte Reliner and include the free Crown Dental Cleaner. I will pay postman one dollar plus postage on arrival. If I am not satisfied after four months, I may return partly used tube for full refund.

(☐ I am enclosing one dollar in full payment, same guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

(Continued From Page 89)

"Has Morton and Carlew been in cahoots long?"

"They've been working together, underhanded of course, for some time, I guess. I gathered that from their conversation. The payroll from the Willow Creek mine will be in town Saturday. That's what they're after!"

"But where does Rusty come in at?"

THE girl measured her words carefully. "Rusty was sheriff of Calico for three years, stranger. And he was a good sheriff, until those bank robbers shot him down. But he's proud of being a lawman. And right now, I'll bet he's sick inside, especially if you tell him that Snake Carlew's wearing his old badge!"

"Carlew—he's sheriff now?"

"Yes, in Rusty's place. Morton's head of the Citizens' League, and he got Carlew appointed sheriff."

"That's good," old John Regis snorted. "Carlew, a sheriff, robbin' a bank. Why, Carlew's lower'n any danged longrider that ever jerked a trigger! Wait'll Rusty hears that, miss. He'll go hog wild, and I don't blame him. Snake Carlew, dirtyin' Rusty's ol' badge!" He added, "But go on, girl."

"Well, that's it."

John Regis put her words together and got the meaning she meant to convey. "Then you want me and Rusty to break up this bank holdup, is that it?"

"That's it,"

"And you think that when Rusty hears about the holdup he'll get mad, fergit he hates guns, an' do some real he-man gunslingin'?"

"Maybe he will."

"He might," John Regis muttered.

Old John watched the girl ride away, and he was frowning. His mind, agile and busy, dwelled on her words. She had something there, no two ways about it. He rode back to where he and Rusty were camped.

John Regis' throat was tight. He was thinking of Mary Manning, about her love for Rusty Midland, how she was depending on him—an old outlaw—to save Rusty Midland for her. And he was thinking also about Morton, the banker, and Carlew, the thief, who aimed to loot the Calico bank.

"Rusty," he said, "I was talkin' to Mary Manning."

"How'd she fin' out we was up here in the hills?"

"She had a hunch we rode this way," John Regis said. He studied Rusty, and liked what he was looking at. "She tol' me Carlew an' Morton aim to rob the Calico bank next Saturday night when the mine payroll is in."

"They what?"

Speaking slowly, he told Rusty what Mary had told him, emphasizing the fact that Carlew was now sheriff, that Carlew and Morton had worked together before. Rusty's face went pale.

"Hell, they can't make Carlew sheriff! I'm still sheriff!"

John Regis shook his head slowly. "Carlew's the law now," he corrected. He was watching Rusty closely. "You do any gunshootin' today?"

"No."

John Regis said, "I know what it is, Rusty. I've seen it before. It's a hard thing to whip, but you can whip it."

"I never want to see a gun again!"

John Regis said, "Let's me an' you stop this bank holdup, Rusty."

Rusty spat. "Why?" he demanded. "They laughed at me in Calico, they run me outa town. Oh sure, when I was okay—before the gunfight—all was fine as frog skin. But after that— Let 'em lose their danged dinero!"

"That's one way to look at it," John Regis said dryly.

"An' the other side of it?" Rusty growled.

"They still send women to prison," John Regis said meaningly.

Rusty frowned. "Explain yourself."

"It's simple, Rusty. It's a frame-up. Mary doesn't even smell the dead herring in the fish-barrel. Who else works in the bank beside Morton and Mary?"

"Nobody else. Why?"

"Use your head. This bank money disappears. Nobody'd suspect Morton of robbin' his own bank. Then who would they suspect? Why, Mary, of course. She's the only other person who knows about this payroll dinero!"

Rusty's face paled. "You mean they'd railroad Mary—claim she'd stole the money? You mean that, fella?"

"That's what I mean."

Rusty sat down on a rock. "Holy smoke," he breathed. "Now I am ridin' into Calico. I'm spottin' myself in that bank an' when Carlew an' his snakes come to rob it—"

(Continued On Page 92)

TWO FAMOUS TOBACCOS FREE IN THIS AMAZING OFFER

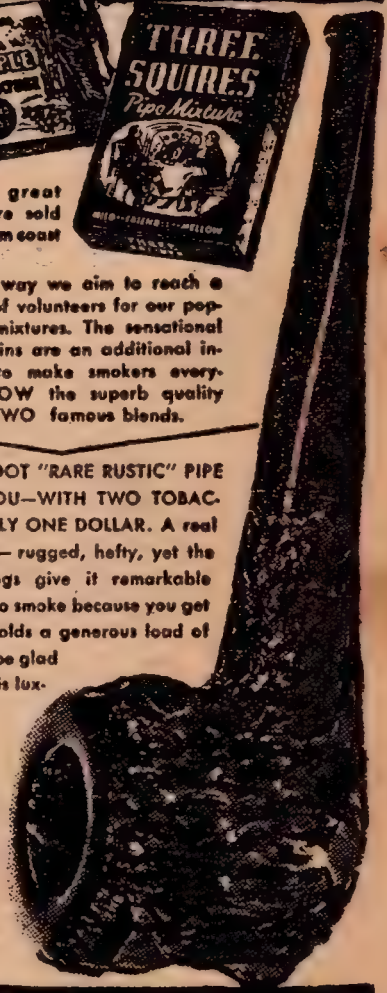
These two great tobaccos are sold in stores from coast to coast.

This is the way we aim to reach a new army of volunteers for our popular pipe mixtures. The sensational pipe bargains are an additional inducement to make smokers everywhere KNOW the superb quality of these TWO famous blends.

THIS BRIAR ROOT "RARE RUSTIC" PIPE COMES TO YOU—WITH TWO TOBACCOS—FOR ONLY ONE DOLLAR. A real he-man's pipe — rugged, hefty, yet the delicate carvings give it remarkable lightness. Easy to smoke because you get a grip on it. Holds a generous load of tobacco. You'll be glad you ordered this luxury pipe!

New Condenser Filter assures clean, healthy smoking.

FLAT BOTTOM KEEPS PIPE UPRIGHT ANYWHERE



1 RARE RUSTIC BRIAR. . . . Value $2.00
1 POUCH Original BLEND 53
RUM and MAPLE PIPE MIXTURE . . .15
1 PACK THREE SQUIRES TOBACCO . . .15
TOTAL VALUE $2.30

All For 1.00 POST PAID

MONEY BACK guarantee

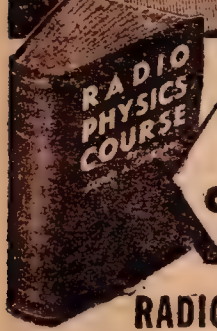
Here's our pledge. You examine the pipe, smoke it with the tobaccos, enjoy it. If you decide our claims don't measure up 100%, keep pipe and tobaccos . . . and we return your money in full. Speed your order on the way today to get in on this. Dollar bill, check, money-order or stamps will do . . . and you'll get entire combination without further cost. Or, send penny post card and pay postman $1.00 plus 18c C.O.D fee.

LEONARD TOBACCO CORP.
100-G EAST 16th ST., NEW YORK, N. Y.

MAKE REAL MONEY NOW!

TRAINED RADIO MEN ARE NEEDED FOR

WAR WORK



Learn radio easily in your spare time at home with this one book!

A $50 VALUE
Complete for only $5

Ghirardi's Practical

RADIO PHYSICS COURSE

Get your basic training in Electricity, Sound, Radio and Television the way thousands of men now making good money on important radio jobs got theirs—all from this ONE big 972-page volume—the biggest, most complete, most highly praised radio training text published. What they have done you can do too—and in your own home during spare time. Prepares you for every branch of radio work—servicing, aviation, broadcasting, electronics, public address, radio manufacturing—either civilian or military. Everything explained so clearly and thoroughly you need no previous electrical or technical experience, no advanced "math" to grasp all essentials.

BASIC TRAINING IN RADIO—SOUND—TELEVISION

Made Easy as A-B-C by Alfred A. Ghirardi

Famous radio engineer, leading world authority on radio instruction, and for 10 years chief instructor in one of the nation's foremost technical schools.

36 Courses in One Big Volume

Here's what you learn about:

Sound, Speech, Music
Electron Theory
Electric Current
Electric Circuits
Resistance
Batteries
Electromagnetism
Electromag-Induction
Condensers, Coils
Alternating Currents
Transformers
Filters
Measuring Instruments
Radio Waves
Vacuum Tubes
Detector and Amplifier Tube Action
Radio-Frequency Amplifiers
"Superheterodynes"
Audio Amplifiers
Power-Supplies
Loudspeakers
Auto and Aircraft Radio
Phone Pickups
Public Address Systems
Short-waves
Phototubes
Cathode-Ray Tubes
Television
Testing; Servicing
Aerials, Grounds
Sound Pictures.

Extra Pay in Army and Navy, Too

Radio knowledge means rapid advancement in the armed forces. Prepare NOW! Ghirardi's amazing book—the very same one that is used in training courses of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and leading schools—will teach you!

Praised by Students and Instructors—

Hugh C. Mackay, Royal Canadian Air-force wireless school: "I have found your book of the greatest assistance in studying the theory of the parts that go into up-to-date receivers. I find the book perfect!" **Sam Sampisi, U. S. Naval Training School:** "This book was recommended to me by our 1st Class Radioman. It is the very best in our work in the Navy for promotions. I recommend it to all my fellow radiomen."

5-Day Examination—Try It!

Grab this opportunity to prove—without risk—how easily this big 972-page book will train you in radio. Send for it now! If not satisfied, you may return it in 5 days—for a full cash refund.

Mail Coupon for 5-Day Examination

Radio & Technical Publishing Co.
45 Astor Place, New York, N. Y.
Dept. D82.

☐ Rush me Ghirardi's RADIO PHYSICS COURSE for 5 days' examination. I will pay postman $5 plus few cents postage and handling charges. If not satisfied, I may return book at end of 5 days for full cash refund.
☐ Mark X in this square if enclosing $5 with this coupon. We then pay full postage charges. Same Money-Back Guarantee, of course.
☐ Send me more detailed information about contents of book free of charge.

Name .....
Address .....
City .....State.....

Famous Western

(Continued From Page 91)

"But you'll have to use a gun, Rusty."

"I'll use a gun, fella. I'll—"

"This is Thursday," John Regis said.

"I got two days to sharpen my gun-speed in," Rusty Midland said determinedly. "Two days to get back that old speed and aim." His tongue came out and wet his lips. "They won't railroad Mary when I'm aroun', I'll tell you that!"

John Regis smiled. "That's fightin' talk," he said.

"I'll back it!"

OLD JOHN REGIS lay awake that night, there under the stars, and thought it over. He remembered the determined tone to Rusty's words, and a great satisfaction filled him. Next morning he made Rusty handle his six-guns.

The big guns kicked, recoiled. Rusty's lead went wide of the mark—a rock set on a stump. His face was a little pale, too. John Regis took the guns.

"Like this," he said.

The big .45's bucked. Flame spewed from their barrels. Lead whanged against rock, and the rock was sent flying. John Regis put another rock on the stump.

"Try again," John Regis said.

Rusty was fighting fear. His lips were tight, his forehead beaded with sweat. He aimed, dropped hammers — and missed again.

"It's tough, John."

"Everythin' worth while is tough to do," John Regis counselled. "But don't think of that target as just a rock, Rusty. Think of it as the button on Snake Carlew's shirt pocket. Think that you're goin' to blast that Carlew dog plumb outa existence with a hot slug of flyin' lead!"

Rusty's eyes narrowed. "That dirty skunk!" he spat. The guns fired, recoiled—and the rock hummed into space.

John Regis grinned. "That's better, Rusty."

That night, John Regis met Mary Manning again. This time, the girl pressed a key into his hand. "The key to the bank," she explained. "That fits the back door." She asked uncertainly, "Did you tell Rusty?"

"I did, Mary."

"What'd he say?"

John Regis smiled. "Me an' Rusty'll be there when them crooks enter the bank," he promised. "We'll be there with our cut-

ters plumb ready to give them hellions hot-lead banquet!"

"And Rusty—how's he going to act?"

Though her words were hesitant, John Regis detected optimism in her words. He tried to make his reply cheerful. "He's gettin' along okay, Mary."

Evidently the girl found uncertainty in his reply. "Maybe you should take me to him?"

"No, girl."

"Why not?"

"Let him fight his battle alone. He's the only one that can whip his fear. Nobody can help a man when he feels like Rusty feels."

She debated. "All right," she said.

Old John Regis rode slowly back to camp. He was thinking of many things — things that concerned Rusty Midland. Despite his optimism in front of Mary, he wondered just how Rusty would act.

When Rusty was mad, like he had been when John had compared the rock to Carlew's shirt-pocket button, he was hell on boots with a gun—he never missed. Face grim, jaw set, he fired deadly, automatically. But when he wasn't mad—

That was another story . . . And it wasn't a nice story. For, even in his mind's eye, old John Regis could see Rusty at this moment —Rusty, pale of face, trembling of hand. And John Regis didn't like to think of that picture.

Then he thought of old Bill Midland. Rusty was Bill's son— John Regis thought of that, and swore that Rusty would come through!

IT WAS twenty miles to Calico, and they broke camp late in the afternoon. Two grim-faced, taciturn men astraddle tough broncs, they rode toward the cowtown, and neither man said anything. There was, after all, nothing to say.

The sun sank, and the long twilight held the rangeland. Overhead, a nighthawk bird, hunting flies, zoomed and wheeled against the darkening background, and already an owl hooted along a creek.

But they were too early. So they dismounted in a dry wash, hunkered on their heels in the buckrush, and waited for total darkness. Old John Regis squatted silently, filled with thoughts, and Rusty smoked cigaret after cigaret, cupping his matches in hands that seemed slightly trembling, John Regis thought.

(Continued On Page 94)

CHILDLESS Wives WHO WISH BABIES!

Doctor's Information SENT FREE!

Concerning simple way followed at home by which the female organs in relievable functional sterility may be assisted so that motherhood may then so often be easily possible! YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MAY LATER THANK THE DAY YOU SENT FOR THIS FREE INFORMATION. Women from over the Nation write us of their joy in becoming mothers at last! FOR FREE COPY write to Warner Co., 318 W. Lake St., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

WHAT CAUSES EPILEPSY?

A booklet containing the opinions of famous doctors on this interesting subject will be sent FREE, while they last, to any reader writing to the Educational Division, Dept. DB-10, 535 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.

UNCENSORED!

Know the Truth about New York's Night Life. Be an "Insider." Know all the ropes!

ONLY 25¢

NEW YORK BEHIND THE SCENES

Lee Mortimer Edition

Pulls no punches! Rips the mask off what goes on behind the "white lights" of Broadway. Gives amazing, uncensored peeks backstage — tells real story of night club life — truth about chorus girls — dance-hall sirens — cabaret gold-diggers.

INSIDE INFORMATION

Sensational exposes of petty rackets. An eye-opener that will astound you. Lays bare secrets of sucker-traps—hot spots—shows how to avoid pitfalls of the Big City—how to get "most for your money."

LIMITED EDITION — ORDER NOW

Get your copy now while they last! Just send 25c in coin. Receive yours in plain wrapper by return mail. Canada, 35c.

HERALD PUBLISHING CO.
22 E. 17th St., Dept. N-7110, New York, N. Y.

LONESOME?

Let me arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Find yourself a sweetheart thru America's foremost select social correspondence club. A friendship letter society for lonely ladies and gentlemen. Members everywhere; CONFIDENTIAL introductions by letter; efficient, dignified and continuous service. I have made thousands of lonely people happy—why not you? Write for FREE sealed particulars. EVAN MOORE, P. O. BOX 969, JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

EPILEPSY—EPILEPTICS!

Detroit lady finds relief for husband. She will tell you how. All letters answered. Mrs. Geo. Dempster, Apt. 4, 6900 West Lafayette Blvd., Detroit, Michigan.

Fistula Facts—FREE

40-page FREE BOOK—tells facts about Fistula, Rectal Abscess, Piles and other rectal and colon disorders; also related ailments and latest corrective treatment. Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite C1011, 926 McGee, Kansas City, Mo.

FALSE TEETH

LOW AS $7.00

90-DAY TRIAL GUARANTEE! Catalog-Folder FREE

Try Brookfield plates—made under supervision of licensed dentist. Priced to fit your pocketbook ON MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Write today

SEND NO MONEY for FREE Impression Material, and information.

BROOKFIELD DENTAL PLATE CO.

Dept. 39-L2 Brookfield, Mo.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
141 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

LONELY?

Let Nationally Known Organization supply desirable friends or select helpmate for you. Stamp and Age.

REV. L. JONES
P. O. Box 2181, Kansas City, Mo.

CASH FOR UNUSED STAMPS

U. S. unused postage wanted at 90% face value for denominations ½c to 19c, 85% face value for denominations 20c to 50c. Small lots 85% face value. MAIL STAMPS REGISTERED. Money sent by return mail. GARBER SERVICE, 72 5th Ave., Dept. D-10, N. Y. C.

SONG POEM WRITERS

Write today for free booklet outlining profit sharing plan.
ALLIED MUSIC, Dept. 51
7608 Reading Cincinnati, Ohio

LONESOME?

Join reliable club, established 1909.

Members everywhere—beautiful girls, nurses, teachers, widows, business men, farmers seeking congenial mates. Many claim wealth. Dignified, dependable and sure, we get results. WRITE FOR BOOK OF PHOTOS AND DESCRIPTIONS FREE. SEALED.

The Exchange, 3827-E Main St., Kansas City, Mo.

(Continued From Page 93)

"That time, John?" Rusty asked.

"Purty soon, Rusty."

They hunkered there, neither speaking, and then John Regis, when the night lay dark and heavy, got to his feet. "Okay, Rusty."

Rusty got slowly a-foot. John Regis glanced at him, then went to his bronc, and he knew Rusty was afraid. They dismounted and, entering Calico through an alley, they rode in behind the bank, tying their broncs in the alley a block away from the bank.

Calico lay sleeping, wrapped by night. Most of the cow-outfits were out on spring round-up, working the rough country miles away, and therefore few cowboys were in town. Lights, cast by kerosene lamps, played in the saloons. But this was a sleepy Saturday night in Calico.

Clinging to shadows, Rusty and John Regis went to the bank's back door. They halted there beside the dark building, and listened—but heard nothing inside the bank. John Regis inserted the key, watching Rusty.

Plainly, Rusty was nervous. His tongue wet his lips. But his hands, John Regis noticed, rested on his .45's, crammed deep into holsters.

"Okay, Rusty?"

"Let's go, John."

Then they were inside the bank, the door moving shut silently behind them. John Regis sniffed the air—it seemed dense, heavy. Behind him, he heard Rusty's heavy, deep breathing. John Regis' eyes searched the gloomy interior.

Yonder, in the wall, was the vault. Silently, with Rusty following, John Regis went to the vault, pulled on the handles, expecting it to be locked. But the steel door swung slowly open.

"Everythin' all set up," Rusty whispered.

"Yep," John Regis agreed. "All them would-be robbers gotta do is come in, highjack the dinero, an' make tracks." He halted suddenly. "Listen!"

Boots sounded outside. Tense, they flattened themselves against the wall, there beside the vault, and waited. The back door opened, and four men slid inside, closing the door behind them. John Regis heard a sibilant voice hiss out, "Where's the dinero, Morton?"

"In the vault, Carlew."

Boots moved forward, heading for the vault. Now John Regis could see the robbers. He saw Carlew, and Morton, and two of Carlew's gunhands. They came like dark shadows, silently, deadly, and their 45's were ready. When they were ten feet away, John Regis spoke.

"That's far enough, you hellions!"

His voice, rasping, harsh, cut the darkness. Carlew and his men halted suddenly, frozen in their tracks. A long moment passed. Finally Carlew's sharp voice broke the silence.

"Who's there?"

"John Regis and Rusty Midland."

Carlew snarled at Morton. "You sol' us out, banker! You spotted these killers—"

"Shut up!" Morton snapped. "What you men doin' here? I can have you arrested. You're on my property!"

"What you doin' here?" John Regis demanded.

"I own this bank. An' Carlew here is sheriff. We're jus' patrolling my property to see things are all right before we turn in for the night."

John Regis said, "You're a poor liar, Morton. Mary Manning told us how you two aim to rob this bank for the stage-line pay-

(Continued On Page 96)

NOTE: This book will not be sold to anyone below 21 years.

Size of book is 9½ x 6½ inches; beautifully printed in clear type; 151 pages with illustrations; HARD COVER; cloth binding.

"SECRETS of LOVE and MARRIAGE"

Daringly Revealed

Edited by Dr. Edward Podolsky

This is an enlightened age. Are you one of those, still **afraid to know the truth** about the many intimate questions of man or woman? Or are you one of those who thinks—"I know it all"—and is actually unaware of many important facts and pleasures? Do you know how to live a complete vigorous and delightful sex life? Do you know your part in the game of love? Every happy marriage is based, to a great extent, on a happy sex life. But how can you lead a satisfactory love life, if you do not know—or are not sure, of the many, many facts and ways of love, of marriage, of sex—of the 1000 ways of a man with a woman! Are you getting ALL that you expected, that you dreamed of—from your love, from your marriage, from your sex life? Or are doubts and difficulties in the art of love troubling you, holding you back, spoiling everything?

Offers a Liberal Education in Sexual Science

At last the whole truth about sex! The time has come to bring this intimate and necessary knowledge into the light of day—into the hands of every adult man and woman who wants to lead a satisfactory, healthy, full love life. Written in simple and frank language—SECRETS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE explains: How to attract the opposite sex—how to make love—how to conduct yourself during your honeymoon. The book teaches the proper sexual conduct in marriage and the technique of performing the sex act. The book explains: the problems of the wife and how to solve them—and the problems of the husbands and how to overcome them. Sometimes they are actual physical disabilities, such as impotence, sterility, etc. The book advises you on correcting these difficulties. It also devotes a chapter to "BIRTH CONTROL," with reasons for and against—and the method of accomplishing. It features a table of "safe periods." It explains conception, pregnancy. In short, it is a complete teacher and guide on practically every phase of Love and Marriage.

"Secrets of Love and Marriage" is an endless source of intimate, intriguing information, from the first awakening of youthful love to the full flowering of grand passion . . . answering many questions you hesitate to ask even your closest friends. You must know the real facts and ways or be cheated out of life's most precious pleasures!

Let Us Send You This Book on Trial!

Send no money now. Just mail the coupon. When book arrives, deposit with postman only 98c plus shipping charges, under our MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. You risk nothing. Mail coupon now.

PART OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Edward Podolsky, M. D. Foreword by James Parker Hendry
Need for sex understanding to aid married happiness — book offers key to true understanding of sex.

Chapter 1—Married Men Should Know
Instinct is not enough — the wedding night—perpetuating the honeymoon — functions of organs and body in marriage relations —skillful wooer can overcome timidities.

Chapter 2—Love Problems of Wives
Why marriages fail—wife often frustrated, disappointed—husband should improve in sexual relations —set routine grows boresome— case of the under-sexed wife— how to keep love alive.

Chapter 3—Scientific Sex Program in Marriage
Marriage based on mutual love and co-operation—instructions for performing and following marriage sex program—chart of safe periods —normal frequency of relations.

Chapter 4—Functions of Organs
The purpose of sex—how conception takes place — secondary stimuli zones—attaining highest pitch in compatibility.

Chapter 5—The Art of Married Love
The importance of preparation—first act the courtship or love-making—second part of the Coitus—many positions possible—final act or climax—half hour all too short for courtship—develop mutual sexual rhythm—reaching a climax together—women often unsatisfied — problems of physical mismatching—overcoming difficulties.

Chapter 6—Secrets of Sex Appeal
What does a man notice—how to dress for charm and appeal—choosing clothing, attending to complexion, figure and personality.

Chapter 7—Dangers of Petting
Is it wise to pet to be popular?—Embracing bodies and kissing lips dangerous?—yearning desires difficult to control.

Chapter 8—How to produce ideal conditions for marital relations in your home.

Chapter 9—Birth Control
A moral issue long debated—arguments in favor and against limitation of children—mechanical contrivances against law—various methods used—no method ideal.

Chapter 10—Mistaken ideas on sex.

Chapter 11—Advice to married people.

Chapter 12—Pregnancy
Changes following fertilization—first indications of pregnancy—care of prospective mother—abortions and miscarriages—dangers of pregnancy—preparations for birth —pregnancy 280 days approximately.

Chapter 13—Techniques favorable for mutual satisfaction.

Chapter 14—Can Sex of Unborn Child Be Chosen
Science investigating various theories—no certain methods.

Chapter 15—Motherhood
Actual process of childbirth—follow doctor's instructions — caesarian operations — puerperal fever — summary for prospective mothers.

Chapter 16 — Methods of Easy Childbirth
Select doctor you have complete confidence in—follow his instructions—anesthetics which diminish labor pains without injuring infant.

Chapter 17—Intimate Questions of Husbands
Overcoming some common sexual problems—how to attain "control" —importance of prolonged courtship—effect of frequency of control—overcoming frigidity in wives —can impotency be overcome—organic deficiencies—various faults and their remedies.

Chapter 18—Intimate Questions of Wives
Importance of free discussion with husband—avoid haste—be patient—strive for perfection—sex a mutual matter—abstinence and excesses—intimate women problems.

Chapter 19 — Feminine Hygiene and Beauty
How to develop your charm and sex appeal.

Chapter 20—Discussion of sexual types.

HERALD PUBLISHING COMPANY
26 East 17th St., Dept. A-7110, New York

HERALD PUBLISHING CO., Dept. A-7110
26 East 17th St., New York, N. Y.

Send me "SECRETS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE," in plain wrapper. I will pay postman 98c plus shipping costs on delivery. I can return the book, if not satisfied, and my money will be refunded. (I am over 21 years old.)

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

State .....

Check here if you are enclosing $1.00 with the coupon and thereby saving C. O. D. charges. Your book sent postpaid under same MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

Impossible to send C. O. D. to Canada; please send $1.20 with order.

SECRETS ENTRUSTED TO A FEW

The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that can not be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the *hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

THIS FREE BOOK

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), an age-old brotherhood of learning, have preserved this secret wisdom in their archives for centuries. *They now invite you to share the practical helpfulness of their teachings.* Write today for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." Within its pages may lie a new life of opportunity for you. Address Scribe R. Y. M.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC), SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

(Continued From Page 94)

roll. We know what you aim to do. You aim to steal this mine gold, blame it on Mary!"

"So that's how they found out," Carlew breathed.

"What'll we do?" Morton whined.

"Go for our guns!" snapped Carlew.

John Regis saw a Carlew gunhand raise his .45, and John Regis' pistol spat. The ugly flame lanced the night, killed the gunman in his boots. And, hard on the gunman's shot, came the other guns.

They bucked and roared, these guns. Lead whammed into the vault, sang from the steel. A window crashed as a slug tore through. Flame and smoke rose in the room. John Regis heard a voice snarl, "Feed 'em lead, John!"

John Regis glanced at Rusty Midland. And what he saw made happiness lift his heart, put a lump in his throat. For Rusty was walking forward, his guns jetting flame—walking into the Carlew guns.

There was no fear in Rusty Midland now. Brave, determined, his guns roaring, Rusty went forward. Then John Regis was moving forward, too, matching Rusty's stride. "I'm with you, pard," John Regis grunted.

For John Regis was smiling, too. Smiling, with the guns yammering with powder-smoke hanging in rope-like coils. He was fighting alongside old Bill Midland's kid, and old Bill would like that. Old Bill, sleeping out yonder in his badland's grave. . . .

A slug burned across old John Regis' arm, and John Regis fired. His bullets found Morton solidly. They seemed to lift Morton slightly, to balance him there on tip-toe, and then Morton was lying in a dark dead heap.

John Regis swung his guns to cover the other Carlew gundog. But, already, the gunman was down, and only Carlew was on his feet. And Carlew, fighting to the end, was shooting at Rusty Midland.

John Regis stared, his lips tight. He saw Rusty's guns boom, saw Rusty's bullets wham into Carlew's chest. Carlew screeched, and his knees buckled. Carlew tried to whip up his failing strength, to raise his sagging guns—but his life ran out of him, leaving him still and limp as he crashed to the floor.

Gun-roar died down. Outside, John Regis heard townsmen running toward the bank. He looked at Rusty Midland.

"Okay, Rusty?"

"Nary a scratch, John. And you?"

"Burn across one arm. Don't amount to nothin'." He added, "How you feel inside, pard?"

"Great, John, great."

"Will it—ever come back?"

"Never, John, never."

John Regis said, "I'm glad, Rusty." He started for the back door, and Rusty Midland stopped him.

"Where to John?"

"Ridin' over the hill, Rusty."

"But, John," Rusty Midland said, "I got a little spread—I need a hand to run it. They'll make me take back my badge now more'n likely, an'—"

John Regis shook his head. "No dice, Rusty. There's a hill ahead, an' then another—Savvy?"

Rusty Midland nodded. "I'll meet you again—some day," he said.

"Some day, Rusty."

Old John Regis rode out then, and he felt darn good. He rode south. Bill Midland was buried down south, there in that cutcoulee, and he wanted to see Bill's grave again. Somehow, he always felt close to his old pard when he knelt there beside that lonely mound of earth. . .

"The PLAYBOY'S HANDBOOK"

In Defense of the Bachelor

Here are gathered in one pleasure-laden book, all the indispensable fittings for every gay male. An open guide to hilarious, sophisticated fun and frolic. A complete treasury of gaiety, burlesque and revelry, an ice-breaker at a twosome or a party, a handbook for those with warm desires but cold feet.

In spite of everything, it must be evident to all who care to observe, that girls will be girls and that boys still like to meet girls. This book is not concerned with "WHY"—but rather with—"WHAT HAPPENS THEN." It examines and explains this subject from many interesting points of view.

It is not for the too young, neither for the too old. But for those with warm blood in their veins and with yearnings for Love, Laughter and Life — this is their ecstatic Promised Book, the elysian delight to warm the cockles of the heart, the beginning and the end of a round of pleasure.

It is a joyous book, and yet it is an informative book. It is the one book you will want to read and re-read, chuckle over and snicker over, quote from and hum from — in short, practically live and go to bed with.

Here is just part of the rare and exhilarating contents:—

- The Bachelor Life
- Love in Hollywood
- Just a Freudy-Cat (or, Memoirs of a Nightmare)
- The 99-44/100% Puritans
- Advice to a Young Man on the Choice of a Maiden
- Stag Mags
- The Greeks Had a Yen for It
- The Playboy at Fifty
- How to Have Fun with Your Clothes on
- Mr. Preble Gets Rid of His Wife
- Going to Bed etc., etc.
- Wit, Wisdom and Wickedness

plus a tremendous collection of Witty, Ribald and Lusty Jokes, Jingles, Tales, Ballads, Songs, Anecdotes, Illustrations, Cartoons, Articles, Art, etc.

Do not deny yourself the enjoyment of these keyhole frivolities and instructions. Send for your copy now. The price is only $1.00—the enjoyment is a thousand-fold. Money Back Guarantee. MAIL COUPON NOW.

NEW EDITION!!

176 PAGES of spicy fun!

Many full page illustrations

KNICKERBOCKER PUBLISHING CO.
98 Liberty St., Dept. DA-10, N. Y. C.

Send me a copy of "THE PLAYBOY'S HANDBOOK"

( ) I am enclosing $1.00.
( ) Send C.O.D. plus postage.

Name .....

Address .....

City & State .....

FEMALE BEAUTY ROUND the WORLD

World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of THE SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia, Female Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES of Strange & Secret Photographs, each page 57 square inches in size!

1,000 REVEALING PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and female slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the camera you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs of life and love in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS including 130 full-page photos, and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

5 GREAT VOLUMES

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS, containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

Contents of 5-Volume Set

Volume 1—The Secret Album of Africa
Volume 2—The Secret Album of Europe
Volume 3—The Secret Album of Asia
Volume 4—The Secret Album of America
Volume 5—The Secret Album of Oceania

Specimen Photos

Various Secret Societies—Civilized Love vs. Savage—Exotic Rites and Cults—Strange Crimes, Criminals—Omens, Totems & Taboos—Mysterious Customs—Dress & Undress Round the World.

1,000 Strange and Secret Photos

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 volumes is 9¼ inches high, and opened over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

METRO PUBLICATIONS,
70 Fifth Ave., Dept. 9910, New York

Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If in 5 days I am not delighted, I will return the book and you will refund my $1.98.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ CHECK HERE, if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving the mailing costs.
Canadian orders $2.50 in advance

Here's the Greatest BILLFOLD BARGAIN in all America

Your LODGE Emblem or Army or Navy Insignia and Name Engraved in 23K. Gold — Absolutely FREE

Special Introductory Offer

$1.98

Rising Costs of Leather May Make It Impossible To Repeat This Amazing Offer!

Genuine Highest Quality Leather BLACK CALFSKIN De Luxe VALUE

Your LODGE Emblem, NAME, ADDRESS, and Social Security Number Engraved in GOLD—FREE!

FREE!

This beautiful three-color life-time Identification Plate carries your full name, address and social security or draft number.

Also FREE— If you order at once we send you this beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, hand engraved with your name, address, city and state. Will last a lifetime.

Men:—Here, without a doubt, is positively the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. For a high quality Calfskin Billfold, beautifully engraved in gold, with your LODGE Emblem and Name, you would expect to pay up to $4.50 and consider it a marvelous buy. If you take advantage of this sensational introductory offer, you can get this superb genuine Calfskin Wallet and Pass Case for only $1.98, and we will send you absolutely free a specially designed three color lifetime Identification Plate, which carries your Social Security Number, your Name and Address or your Army Draft Number. This fine grain calfskin Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has three pockets each proctected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards.

When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you find only in quality Calfskin. Your choice of Emblems and Initials, are beautifully embossed in 23 karat gold on the face of the Billfold. Due to difficulty in obtaining choice leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember if you send your order promptly, we will include absolutely FREE, a beautiful identification Key Tag and Gilt chain to match, all hand engraved with your Name, Address, City and State. If after receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today, without fail so you won't be disappointed.

Rush This Coupon For This Once-In-A-Lifetime Bargain!

IMPORTANT! This Triple Combination Billfold makes one of the most handsome and appreciated gifts you could possibly give to any man! If you have a boy or a friend serving his country, surprise him with this hand engraved calfskin billfold as a gift. Send your order today!

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART,
Dept. 245, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago.

If you want a LODGE, ARMY or NAVY Insignia, state name here

Gentlemen: I enclose $1.98. Please send me a Genuine Calfskin, Billfold with my name and choice of Emblems engraved in 23k gold. Include absolutely free, a life-time Identification Plate carrying my full Name and Social Security Number, or Draft Number. Also include FREE an Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand-engraved with my Name, Address, City and State.

My Full Name.....
(Please print clearly)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

Social Security Number.....Army Draft Number.....

☐ Please ship the above C.O.D. for $1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

FUN FOR A SOLDIER

JUST PUBLISHED

A rousing, rollicking Gift for YOUR MAN in the Service. We guarantee safe delivery.

"KEEP 'EM LAUGHING" will have any Man in the Service roaring with laughter. Jammed from cover to cover with the best of all material ever written about, for and by our fighting men. TEN COMPLETE STUPENDOUS SECTIONS—over 200 pages—JOKES, ANECDOTES, BROADSIDES—A Private's Romance — SQUADS WRITE — and How they write—HAND GRENADES — dizzy, rowdy,—MADEMOISELLE FROM ARMENTIERES — and other famous songs—SOLDIERS' VERSES — LIMERICKS ON PARADE — MOTHER GOOSE FOR DOUGHBOY'S — MILITARY TOASTS — GLEEFUL, HILARIOUS ILLUSTRATIONS — the army with its lid off — the army from the inside. Begins where the U. S. O. leaves off. It's only $1.00— but it'll give fun for the duration. Rush your order NOW!

SPECIAL $1.00

Unique, Colorful BOOKS for Every Taste

You Can Learn to PLAY THE PIANO

If you have an "ear for music," you can learn to play the piano just as easy as "to follow a song" with your voice. "SELF-INSTRUCTION IN THE PIANO" contains an amazingly simple new method which quickly and easily leads you from first striking the keys to playing complete pieces of music. No tiresome scales or exercises. No long hours of practice. No teacher is needed. With this method, you will be able to play a song the first hour—and attain skill and mastery within short weeks. Don't deny yourself the pleasure and popularity—delight your family and friends. Learn to play the Piano. Complete course in this one book — only $1.00 postpaid.

Special Only $1.00

How to Make A Good Living on a Small Farm

Do you want a small farm? Do you now own one? A LIVING FROM THE LAND by William B. Duryee—gives you sound, practical advice on managing and running a farm (or even a plot of land) on a resultful, profitable basis. The book tells how to choose a farm, what and how to plant, choice and care of livestock, poultry, etc., irrigation, harvesting, storing, sale of products, etc., etc. Every page jammed with practical facts and information. Completely illustrated. This book will guide you to the pleasures, security and good living possible on a small farm.

Special Only $1.00

Contains FIRST-AID Section for War Emergencies

FAMILY BOOK of MEDICINE

by David Polowe, M.D.

When a sudden Scream of Pain terrifies your home, this great book of Medical Advice may save a life. Here you will find exactly what to do in emergencies—here you will also find, in simple, understandable language, the most up-to-date and accurate knowledge obtainable on the prevention and treatment of all the ordinary ills that may afflict the members of a family. This is an invaluable reference book—and should be in every home.

$1.00 ONLY

...If it weren't for the married men, we couldn't have carried on at all and if weren't for the cheating married women, we would have made another million dollars." . . . Said one of the Everleigh Sisters

COME INTO MY PARLOR

by Charles Washburn

This is an authentic and intimate account of Chicago's notorious Everleigh Club conducted early in the century when a whole section of the city was "wide open." Many famous and wealthy men patronized this "gilded palace." The author formerly a Chicago newspaper man, in this Biography of the Aristocratic Everleigh Sisters, tells the inside story — describes "parties," names and gives colorful details of the aristocratic sisters and how they changed the "joy of life" into a pot of gold. It is swell reading from front door to back, with good stop-overs in between." —N. Y. Morning Telegraph.

Special Only $2.00

SISTER OF THE ROAD

as told to Dr. Ben L. Reitman

The frank, uncensored story of a wandering woman hobo. Tells the story of a restless, adventurous girl who "took to the road" to satisfy her lust for living and excitement. What happens to her during 15 years of wandering is detailed and revealed with a candor usually reserved for a confessional box. Brimful of stark happenings—unashamed facts—amatory experiences—etc. etc. Proves that truth is stranger than fiction. A startling, exciting book that stirs the blood and the senses strangely. 314 pages—hard cover bound.

$1.98 ONLY

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

If any book we send you is not satisfactory return it within 5 days after receipt, and we will promptly refund your money.

Anyone Can Draw!

SELF-INSTRUCTION IN ART

by CHARLES H. PROVOST

Anyone who has learned even to write, can learn to draw! This book removes the mysticism that has surrounded art for years. By reducing the elements of drawing to its essence, it teaches THE BEGINNER — to draw, and to advance into more and more difficult subjects. For the practiced artist, it is a source book and veritable mine of information. This book guides you from the first stroke on paper to selling the finished art work. Includes specific instruction, advice, tricks, time-savers, special effects, on: — Still Life, Animals, Human Figure, Portraits, Lettering, Layouts, Color-work, etc., etc. Includes Glossary of Art Terms, Supplies, Use of Such, Guides, Types of Work, Mediums, etc., etc. Completely illustrated.

SPECIAL $1.00

HOW TO ORDER

Any of These Special Books

All books are full library size, excellently printed and durably bound for permanent use. Fill out the convenient coupon alongside, check the titles of the book or books you want and mail the order. If you send payment with order, we prepay all postage charges; if C. O. D., plus few cents postage. MAIL ORDER NOW.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!

Knickerbocker Pub. Co., Dept. T
98 Liberty St., New York, N. Y.

Send me the book or books I have checked below:—

( ) Keep 'em Laughing $1.00
( ) Living From the Land 1.00
( ) Sistor of the Road 1.98
( ) Self-Instruction in Art 1.00
( ) Play the Piano 1.00
( ) Family Book of Medicine 1.00
( ) Come Into My Parlor 2.00

( ) *I am enclosing $.... in full payment.*
( ) *Send C. O. D. plus postage.*

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....